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# Re-Visiting Homosexuality in Cameroon: Effective Advocacy on the Path from Homophobia to Dignity and Equality

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University of San Francisco

San Francisco, California

**RE-VISITING HOMOSEXUALITY IN CAMEROON:**

Effective Advocacy on the Path from Homophobia to Dignity and Equality

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by

Jean Cedric Ndzomo

2013



## **Abstract**

Cameroon, one of the countries in the world that continues to criminalize homosexuality, has been on the news recently due to the torture and murder of young journalist and gay activist, Eric Ohena. This paper examines the discrimination faced by the LGBTI community in Cameroon by exploring the origins of homophobic violence, the role played by Cameroon's legal system, and the struggles of LGBTI Cameroonians in their fight for a better life. The analysis includes a review of the work by scholars on colonialism and sexuality in Africa, and questions the roots of violence and abuse against the LGBTI community by Cameroonians. The paper concludes with recommendations for effective and coordinated advocacy for and by LGBTI people inside and outside Cameroon in order to dismantle the bigoted actions and attitudes and work toward a more tolerant society.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My journey until here has been very unique. Though it has been a voyage with lot of vision, overwhelming steps, struggle and hard work, it has brought me to this path which I hope will open many doors full of adventures in the future. The journey all started in summer 2012; after graduating from Berry College in Rome Georgia, and working full time as a marketing assistant for a tour operating company for about a year and half. Working for the company within their international branch reinforced my passion of wanting to learn more about International affairs, culture, laws and politics. I then made a key decision to relocate to San Francisco and attend the University of San Francisco where I was welcomed into the International Studies graduate program. Being from Cameroon, my intention has always been between helping and teaching others about the difference our country and others have and how to complement or better function with each other; or to look at different laws and cultural difference that hinder a place from developing and figure out how to dismantle these for the best. The objective envisioned since day one is clearly clarifying due to my studies of languages, business, international laws and peace and conflicts theories across my undergraduate and graduate program of study; along with the great discussions and life changing experiences during classes and studies abroad (2008-2013). This amazing voyage was supported all along the way through great insight and inspiration by mind blowing educators such as Dr. Julee Tate, Dr. Clarice Ford, Professor Harold A. Mendoza Salty, Professor Shawn Roberts (to name only a few).

Throughout this journey, I can't but to acknowledge as well the participation of key graduate colleagues such as Aime Cesaire, Carolini de Gikuru, Joey Stosberg, Cyan Pei, Emily Sheffield, Newton Martin, Medhi Boubiya, Veronica Henao and Patrick Musibi that not only struggled with me while writing or final work for the program, but also bore with me through class discussions as I never gave an easy way out to opinions or thoughts I thought were not just, well developed or said in relation to the topic in hand.

In the International Studies Program, it was impossible to overlook the vast generosity, dedication, and great support of several important faculty members: Dr. Cecilia Santos Assistant Professor in the program taught me a lot about the differences in gender, the concept of Feminism, and opened my eyes on views of what impact globalization has from one nation to the other. Professor Aaron J. Hahn Tapper taught me the difference between "truth & fact" as well as gave me keen advice on how to look at conflicts, what measure can work best in multiple areas of the world for better peace and did a great job at elaborating the work of amazing peace worker such as Gandhi. Dr. Christopher Loperena also assistant professor within the program provided continuous support to my research thesis and interests, taught me a lot as well about race, gender and the issues that revolve around it, and also revealed great insights about the concept of citizenship and the environment in which we live in. Last but not least, I thank Dr. Anne Louise Bartlett who took us all in as her children and provided wholehearted advice in the great moments of writing or finding ourselves, and also warm support during the lowest moments of frustration and desperation. Not only she exposed us at start on the rigors of graduate study along with chart of steps on how to manage our time, she never once fails to redirect us to the path need it when we were detouring from it. Her tireless support and encouragement, immeasurable knowledge, fantastic experience and gifted words of wisdom gave me strength through the toughest time and wire me to better understand keys and concepts that at time were very blurred.

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smile to embrace life daily no matter what the struggle I was encountering with the research, the concepts, dealing with the interviews and more. Michele Magar a Civil Rights Attorney/Journalist who kindly gave me a home and pushed me further to trust in my abilities when I was down. She used her experiences as Journalist to teach all the inside out on how to conduct and retain great information needed that can allow someone to produce a well structure document, as a attorney and women from another country, she showed and taught me how to deal with different situations, handle different people while conducting a work or a research that is dear to you. Michele holds a unique place in my intellectual development as well as shaping better structure of my understanding of laws and policies both locally and internationally. Edward Guthman, a Journalist, who I can not thank enough, helped me with the proof reading of my writing, which given that English is my second language, is not as great I would like it to be. His friendship and guidance has not only led me through the ins and outs of my academic life, but has also taught me to love and appreciate life and other's suggestions. Through his presence and help during this period, I developed better writing structure, and learned a lot grammatically as well as the orthography or meanings of many new words.

I also wanted to take this opportunity and thanks Alice Nkom, Michele Togue, Dominique Menoga, Josselin Moreau, Deb Tullman, 'Rose', 'Rameau', the entire ORAM crew, that willingly accepted to participate in the writing of my thesis whether it was through interview as someone being in my case study or a coworker or friend that gave me advice at times.

Finally but Certainly not the least, I wanted to thanks Gisele Nzeukou, Jonathan Danh, my siblings Elie Njeveme and Virginia Nganyiep and my mother Florette Njonu for always supporting and being there for me throughout this journey. Their parts within this voyage has been very crucial and I know that the fruitful result below could have never seen light today if there were not by my side.

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## **ACRONYMS**

**AC:** Alternative Cameroon

**AIDS:** Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

**ADEFHO:** Association of Defense for Homosexuals

**CAMFAIDS:** Cameroonian Foundation for AIDS

**GSN:** Gays Stars News

**HIV:** Human Immunodeficiency Virus

**HRW:** Human Right Watch

**ICCPR:** International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

**LGBTI:** Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transsexual, Inter-sexual

**NGO:** Non governmental Organization

**ONU:** Organization des Nations Unies

**ORAM:** Organization for Refugees, Asylum and Migration

**UCLA:** University of California Los Angeles

**UDHR:** Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**UN:** United Nations

**UPR:** Universal Periodic Review





## **Introduction**

Jean Cedric Ndzomo<sup>1</sup>

Born in 1980 and raised in a small neighborhood of Yaounde, Eric Ohena Lembembe was a journalist and an activist for the LGBTI community in Cameroon. On July 15, 2013, he was found dead in his house, and according to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) was killed because of his sexual orientation. Lembembe was tortured; his legs, arms and neck were broken; his body was burned by an iron. Several messages and threats from anti-gay groups in Cameroon confirmed the public belief that he was killed because he was gay and because he was an outspoken defender of the LGBTI cause in Cameroon<sup>2</sup>.

Dan Luttaufer of Gay Star News (GSN), a website and international media source, reported on January 24, 2013 about police officers attacking and brutally beating a man in Yaounde because he was defending gay rights. One month prior to the encounter, another man was assaulted and beaten by police officers because of his feminine appearance<sup>3</sup>. Luttaufer also mentioned the previous arrest of Joseph Mesina, a 25-year-old man who was arrested, beaten and brutalized by police officials when he tried to prevent a homophobic attack<sup>4</sup>.

Human Rights Watch on March 21, 2013 reported similar stories of gays being abused both by citizens and police of Cameroon. One man was being beaten on the bottoms of his feet with the back of a machete. Another was beaten with an iron belt, asked to swim in the gutter, and burned on the chest with plastic bags only because of rumors and a friend's suspicion that he was homosexual. In the

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The author was raised in Cameroon and emigrated to the United States at age 17. He has a B.A. from Berry College in Rome, Georgia and will receive his Master's Degree in International Studies in December, 2013 from the University of San Francisco.

2 Robbie Corey Boulet, "Eric Ohena Lembembe, Gay Rights Activist, Tortured And Killed" HoffPuff Gay Voices, November 15, 2013.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/16/eric-ohena-lembembe-killed-dead\\_n\\_3604460.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/16/eric-ohena-lembembe-killed-dead_n_3604460.html)

3 Dan Luttaufer "Cameroon police arrested and assaults a man for defending gays", Gay Stars News, January 23, 2013 <http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/cameroon-police-arrests-and-assaults-man-defending-gays230113>

4 Dan Luttaufer, "Cameroon police arrested and assaults a man for defending gays" Gay Stars News, January 23, 2013.

economic capital Douala, others were forced by the police to sleep naked on the ground in jails, beaten severely with clubs and subjected to anal exams. The problem has amplified to the extent that police officers will arrest and perform acts of violence on people simply because they carry condoms and lubricant, which, in the eyes of the police, indicates someone who practices same-sex acts<sup>5</sup> I was born and raised in Cameroon, and have lived in the United States since 2005. During a visit to Cameroon in December 2012, I witnessed an increasingly volatile situation regarding the LGBTI community. The increase in homophobic incidents is substantial, and has resulted in longer prison terms as well as death sentences for gays and lesbians. This sudden change is primarily due to a government that allows its state officials enforcement to physically, morally and mentally abuse members of the LGBTI community, and secondarily to powerful religious leaders who preach hatred and condemnation against this community. Underpinning recent anti-gay sentiments are existing laws that prohibit gay sex.

According to HWR, 28 people in Cameroon during the years 2010 and 2011 have been persecuted because of being homosexual<sup>6</sup>. Their recent periodic review of 2012 stated that ADEFHO, first organization that provides services for the LGBTI in Cameroon, documented that 51 arrests and prosecution towards the LGBTI community has been made thus showing again the major increase<sup>7</sup>.

In Cameroon, homosexuality is widely perceived as a malediction or disease that a person might have, causing them to be dishonored, beaten, banned from participation in multiple aspects of society or even killed. Homophobic violence in Cameroon, as well as in many other regions of Africa such as Uganda or Kenya, is often sanctioned or ignored.

Contrary to the West, where homosexuality is commonly viewed as an increasingly acceptable

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Neela Ghoshal “ Cameroon: Rights abuse in 'homosexuality' prosecution”, Human Rights Watch, March 24, 2013  
<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/21/cameroon-rights-abuses-homosexuality-prosecutions>

6 Neela Ghoshal, “Guilty by Association; Human rights violations in the enforcement of Cameroon's anti-homosexuality law” (Human Rights Watch: March 2013)

7 Universal Periodic Review by Human Rights Watch, October 2012  
[http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related\\_material/2012%2010%20Cameroon%20LGBT%20UPR%20ENGLISH%20-%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/2012%2010%20Cameroon%20LGBT%20UPR%20ENGLISH%20-%20FINAL.pdf)

sexual orientation, in Cameroon it is perceived as anathema to the country's religion, roots and culture. In some parts of the country, homosexuality is associated with witchcraft, based on the belief that witches routinely perform same-sex acts with each other<sup>8</sup>. Many view homosexuality as a “disease” or “sin” that was brought to the African continent by the white colonials<sup>9</sup>. In some countries such as Sudan, Sierra Leone or Tanzania, which are arguably some of the most dangerous countries for the LGBTI community in Africa, homosexuals are stoned, killed or sentenced from 14 years to life imprisonment<sup>10</sup>. Homosexuals who evidence their “true self” through actions or physical appearance are either shunned or incarcerated for long periods of time by state officials<sup>11</sup>.

In others countries such as South Africa, homosexuality is not as prevalent because of the laws that protect the LGBTI community, and also because race discrimination is seen as more rampant and more important<sup>12</sup>. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) people continue to be mistreated, abused and discriminated against – a result of the ineffective laws and policies already in place to protect these individuals. In addition to that, the impunity of those who commit such crime of violence feeds parts of this society to continue mistreating this sexual minority. Many know that they can be exempted from punishment by the police officials by accusing whomever they victimized of being gay or lesbian because they know the position of government officials in regards to homosexuality. This in return exacerbates even more the abuse on the LGBTI community<sup>13</sup>. Given the

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8 Peter Geshiere, “Identity and Persecution” PhD diss in African Antropology at the University of Amsterdam; page 128 <http://dare.uva.nl/document/361873>

9 Geshiere, “Identity and Persecution”, page 129

10 Esther Taquintic Misa, “Acts, Expressions of Violence, Homophobia Against Gays, Lesbians in Africa on the Rise – Amnesty International” International Business Times, June 26, 2013. <http://au.ibtimes.com/articles/483264/20130626/violence-homophobia-gays-lesbians-africa.htm#.UoEOliSpaov>

11 Neela Ghoshal, “Cameroon: Spate of Attacks on Rights Defenders”, Human Rights Watch News, July 1, 2013. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/01/cameroon-spate-attacks-rights-defenders>

12 Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, *Defiant desire: Gay and Lesbians lives in Africa, 1994-1995* New york: Routledge, 1995  
Though South Africa has this constitution that legally protect the rights of the LGBTI community there, there has been many publicized cases within the country of Lesbians being raped and pointed at “as raping them to cure them from their homosexuality or disease”; which once again here continues to be perceived as an evil malediction or disease just like in Cameroon.

13 Rose interview with Author, Tape recorder, Oakland, October 30, 2013

tremendous personal risks faced by people within that community, the need to address this issue has never been more urgent.

Given that Cameroon's laws punish same-sex acts and pro-homosexual activism with prison and given that government officials fail to conduct standard procedures to prosecute anti-gay offenders such as Eric Ohena Lembembe's murderers, one has to ask how this Cameroonians LGBTI community survive daily under such violence and abuse.

Cameroon's government has evidenced no tolerance for homosexuality, and the lack of investigation into Lembembe's murder cannot be dismissed as an oversight or a fluke. In fact, it is the result of actions by the Cameroonian government that spreads to the populace at large. In order to stop such murders and violence, serious efforts need to be made to remedy the situation and ensure the safety of the LGBTI community in Cameroon <sup>14</sup>.

I strongly believe it is important for the public to know about the impact of violence and abuses on LGBTI people. This matter is an ongoing crisis happening daily all over the world, but to different degrees depending on the country or region. When talking about country or region, I would like to emphasize on the developing world<sup>15</sup>. It is instructive here to consider Immanuel Wallerstein's concept of periphery and center, a concept wherein the state relies on a government system that, through commercial enterprises, engages the use of force, and controls the economic flow from the periphery to the center. Western countries and South Africa, which are more developed, have the opportunity, due to their economical and political stability, to instill laws that protect the security of the LGBTI community. This is contrary to what we find in countries with low economical and political status such as Cameroon or Uganda. Additionally, it is important to consider the legacy of colonialism where frontiers and boundaries were informed by the colonialist perspectives of core-periphery relationships. We also have

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<sup>14</sup> Tamale, "African Sexuality: A reader", 2011

<sup>15</sup> A developing world: Regarding the human nutrition aspect, a developing world another for third world is a nation of the world that is less economically and technologically advanced than the other.

to consider their geographic location within these regions and the fact that revenues along with importation and exportation revolved around these areas, thus establishing the areas of these cities today as to be much developed and modern in the center than it is as you go away from the center. Wallerstein also commented through his theory that colonialism participated in the better understanding of modern manifestations processes that happened within the centers of those cities in comparison to their periphery<sup>16</sup>.

In my thesis, I want to raise people's awareness of discrimination faced by the LGBTI community when searching for employment; the verbal and emotional abuses conducted by the police; and the physical violence faced by LGBTI groups in Cameroon. I will discuss the daily living conditions, and present ways of educating more people on sexual orientation in the hope of improving the LGBTI community's civil and legal rights and personal security. I also plan to demonstrate how the policies and laws in Cameroon affect and exacerbate the violence and abuse against the LGBTI community.

Using the current literature and case studies of two Cameroonians who recently fled Cameroon to San Francisco in a search for asylum based on their homosexuality, I aim to draw out arguments and evidence that support my thesis to develop a concrete research project that will be available for educational purposes in Cameroon and other developing countries where this issue is prevalent. By studying these issues related to the larger theme of homosexuality, I am convinced that I can bring a significant contribution to increasing the understanding of LGBTI people as equal citizens. In giving a voice to LGBTI opinions and views in my research, my ultimate goal is to broaden the discussion of this problem and its effects on the lives of not only Cameroonians, but also of all Africans.

### **The Historical Context**

Homosexuality in West Africa, and precisely in Cameroon, is a phenomenon that existed long

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16 Immanuel Wallerstein, *"The Modern world System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the World Economy in the sixteen century"* (Academic press Inc, London England) 1974, 346

before colonization. As in other cultures where it has been encountered since the beginning of time, homosexuality has been present all along in African culture and specifically in the Cameroonian culture – albeit in unspoken form.

Having lived in Cameroon, and heard stories and read about the atrocities faced by the LGBTI community on a daily basis, I felt impelled to focus my research thesis on the physical violence, moral and emotional abuse, and unspeakable living conditions of the LGBTI community. However, in order to elaborate on this subject, one must understand first the roots and definitions of sexuality within the African continent, which in corms<sup>17</sup> contemporary approaches to homosexuality.

Sylvia Tamale, the first woman dean on the Law faculty at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, wrote the book “*African Sexualities*.” She addresses the phenomenon of “black sexualities,” which she uses to refer to the continent. In the essays and poems compiled in her book, Tamale questions in a way what could have been Africa in regards to homosexuality given a different comprehension of sexuality with regard to the vast cultural differences that comprise the continent. Tamale believes that within the African continent, sexuality is still viewed through the lens of a superficial myth created by colonizers to establish control and power over black Africans. She cites Frantz Fanon: “

The myth of black sexuality was simply a myth of excessive sexuality: it held that 'with the Negro everything takes place at the genital level.’”

The main focus of her work asks where this myth originated and how it came to be, and explores the impact this black sexuality myth has had on African society.

Whereas American author and UCLA<sup>18</sup> professor Joseph Bristow in his book “*Sexuality*” defines it as: “

an array of erotic identifications that involve complex physical displacements, projections and

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<sup>17</sup> In corm: shows the relationships, demonstrate the relation to homosexuality

<sup>18</sup> UCLA: University of California Los Angeles.

fetishism, or as a set of discursive practices that support and/or subvert dominant cultural and political ideals.”

Tamale believes that if the myth is revealed as a myth and not as a reality, sexuality within Africa will be seen differently. I believe she agrees with Fanon, given that she believes and presented views of sexuality being more than just the actual sexual relation with everything only focused on the genital parts. In her book, Tamale presents the different sexual orientation in the attempt to demonstrate better understanding of the human sexual attitudes and behaviors; which encompassed through this concept of African sexualities. In my opinion, Tamale captures the complexity of homosexuality that is denied by many<sup>19</sup>. In regards to heterosexuality, she refers to the objectification of women as being a male gaze based on their dress code:

“First, the senator assumes that women's sole motivation in dressing is to please, impress or attract men as well as to stimulate male desire.....<sup>20</sup>”

Here she makes a connection between what is perceived by women exposing their bodies and by those women who don't and the possible impact this has on the male viewer and the incidence of harassment, rape or physical beating. Once again, given that black sexuality by Fanon's terms revolved around the genital part when it comes to Negro, can be seen through objectification of the women because of all of these impulse and attractions she wakes up in the man who is tempted of one thing only sex or having sex. In regard to homosexuality, she and other scholars such as Rudolf Pell Gaudio, cite the difference they observed in the celebration of sexuality in Africa compared to the Western world<sup>21</sup>.

Mark Epprecht, in his book “*Sexuality and social Justice in Africa*,” gives evidence of the longstanding existence of homosexuality in African culture, and writes that homosexuality was accepted when the party in power was exercising these practices. This was before the arrival of the first German

19 Tamale, “African Sexuality: A reader”, 2011

20 Tamale, “Nudity and Morality: Legislating women's bodies and dress in Nigeria” in African Sexuality: A reader, (Pambazuka Press: Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi & Oxford, 2011) 124

21 Tamale, “Representing African Sexualities” in African Sexuality: A reader; (Pambazuka Press: Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi & Oxford, 2011)199-210



colonialist on the west coast of Cameroon. Contrary to current circumstances where the state is viewed as the leading enemy of the LGBTI community in Africa, and the media and religious leaders encourage anti-gay discrimination; the state during the pre-colonial era strengthened same-sex bonds because they believed those bonds contributed to the cohesiveness, ability and strength of a warrior. In my opinion, his book does a great job examining the cultural bias of the African community, which blinds them to the other side of the horizon where sexualities other than heterosexuality exist.

Peter Geshiere, professor of African anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, discusses in *“Identity and Persecution”* the fact that in Cameroon homosexuality is associated with witchcraft. Though many never practiced sexual acts with same-sex partners, Geshiere writes that “witches” in Cameroon were cross-dressers<sup>22</sup> using both male and female attributes in their healing rituals. He argues that homosexuals have been associated with witchcraft because witches have traditionally been portrayed as wearing costumes of the opposite gender in their rituals<sup>23</sup>.

In addition to Geshiere, the work of Stephen O. Murray touches on a similar concept of homosexuality as a practice embedded in African culture long before the colonial era<sup>24</sup>. In his work, *“Homosexuality in 'Traditional' Sub-Saharan Africa and Contemporary South Africa,”* Murray shows that homosexual acts were practiced in pre-colonial African culture. They were not accepted openly, he writes, but at the same time were not strongly condemned as we observe within these societies today<sup>25</sup>.

Through multiple works and research on homosexuality, scholars have striven to disprove the notion that homosexuality is an imperialist legacy. In interviews I conducted in the fall of 2013, Cameroonian lawyers Alice Nkom and Michel Togue both said that leading officials in African countries

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22 Cross dresser: is a person that dresses in clothing characteristics of the gender or sex opposite to his or her own.

23 Peter Geshiere, *“Identity and Persecution”* PhD diss in African Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam; page 128 <http://dare.uva.nl/document/361873>

24 Roscoe M., (1987)\* *the Mamlukes,\** in *Cultural Diversity and Homosexualities*, ed. S. O. Murray. New York: Irvington, pp. 213-219

25 Murray, S. O. (1998) *“Homosexuality in 'Traditional' Sub-Saharan Africa and contemporary South Africa: an overview, “in Boy-wives and Female-husbands. Studies on African Homosexualities*, ed. S. O. Murray and Roscoe. New York: St Martin's Press, pp. 1-18

use this notion of homosexuality as a colonial legacy to scapegoat and to distract the public from real hindering the country's development<sup>26</sup>. It has been shown in different studies that Africans were generally not hetero-normative (here as the cultural bias in favor of opposite-sex relationships of a sexual nature, and against same-sex relationships of a sexual nature), with most communities found to be “normatively fluid(here seen as the standard or the norm created by society)”<sup>27</sup>. Though we still can observe the cultural biases of opposite-sex relationships, the current historical context on LGBTI continue to demonstrate the abuse that influence that community.

In the past year, violence against the LGBTI community in Cameroon has stirred debate about the position and responsibility of government on this topic and how African leaders should take steps to control violence, abuse and injustice against the LGBTI community. Tragedies such as the death of activist and journalist Eric Ohena Lembembe; the destruction by arson of an organization providing services for the LGBTI community; the multiple threats received by lawyers defending these people; and the torture and harassment perpetrated by police lead us to conclude that the issue of anti-LGBTI violence is rapidly escalating while decisions that should be made to remedy the crisis are nearly nonexistent. At a recent Organization of the United Nations (ONU) conference, said Alice Nkom, Cameroon's Prime Minister Philemon Yang openly discussed the death of Lembembe and said it was justified given the threat that Lembembe presented to Cameroon society<sup>28</sup>.

Not only do Police dehumanize members of this sexual minority by beating them, demanding sexual favors from them or treating them like animals, but Human Rights Watch (HRW) researcher Neela Ghoshal reports that many people are imprisoned or fined without evidence of sexual interaction

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26 Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (Yaounde-San francisco), September 20, 2013.

Michel Togue interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (Yaounde – San Francisco), September 26, 2013.

27 Bernedette Muthien, “Heteronormativity in the African Women’s movement”, Women's global reproductive rights, newsletter, 79, 2003 #2.

<http://www.engender.org.za/publications/heteronormativity.html>.

28 Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (Yaounde-San francisco), September 20, 2013.

with another person of the same sex<sup>29</sup>. Religious and political leaders also take advantage of the vulnerability and defenselessness of the people within this sexual minority. Robbie Corey Boulet, a journalist based in Monrovia, Liberia, reported on March 21, 2013 that judges in court take pleasure in mocking detainees charged with homosexuality. Many detainees face humiliating anal examinations that are proven not to be of any medical value but are still used today by Cameroon officials<sup>30</sup>. Simon-Victor Tonye Bakot, Archbishop Emeritus of Cameroon, has launched a hate scheme towards the LGBTI community by preaching that homosexuality is impure and unacceptable according to the Bible and Cameroon tradition. His status as a leader of the church has a great influence upon people, who conclude from his message that the unhappiness of certain families in Cameroon is due to their children being part of the LGBTI community. Bakot commented that these “sins” need it to be banned from the society for the people of Cameroon to live in peace; which puts the lives of the LGBTI people in greater danger than they were before<sup>31</sup>.

Here again, we see the clear connection of the government and the church. Though it is not specifically stated that the church leaders create and support the stigmatization of the LGBTI community, the fervor and frequency of anti-gay preaching by prominent clergymen suggests in my opinion the alliance of both high powers of the country. Christianity, one of the most practiced religions in Cameroon, with 70% of the population according to John S. Mbiti in his book “*Introduction to African Religion*,” was adopted during the period of colonialism, and plays a crucial role in the life of homosexuals in Cameroon and many other African Countries<sup>32</sup>. The strong relationship of culture to religion, religion to the law, and the law to same-sex acts, makes it even harder for homosexuals to experience life without persecution.

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29 Neela Ghoshal, “Cameroon: Spate of Attacks on Rights Defenders”, Human Rights Watch News, July 1, 2013. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/01/cameroon-spate-attacks-rights-defenders>

30 Robbie Corey-boulet New article , Police Abuse suspected Gays in Cameroon, Voice of America, March 21, 2013. <http://www.Voanews.com/content/Cameroon-homosexuality-human-rights-watch/1626171.html>

31 Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (Yaounde-San francisco), September 20, 2013.

32 John S. Mbiti, “Introduction to African Religion” (Haley Court, Jordan Hill, Oxford-1991).

As I mentioned earlier, religious leaders preach against homosexuality, calling it a violation of traditional cultural values, an assault against “traditional marriage” between men and women and an impediment to procreation. In her 2006 book, *“Other voices other words: the global church speaks out on Homosexuality”* editor Terry Brown compiles several essays on the importance of the church in African culture and the impact of the church's highly conservative attitudes on the treatment of homosexuals<sup>33</sup>. The churches maintain their proscription against homosexuals by misinterpreting many Bible verses such as the one about Sodom and Gomorrah or when God said, “Men and women go on and multiply.” Given that the church in Cameroon is directed by conservative people with deep attachments to Cameroonian cultural beliefs, and the fact that scriptures still play an important part in Christian ethics, the lives of the LGBTI community and the subject of homosexuality continue to be a difficult ground to negotiate.

It is clearly hard for gay and lesbian Africans to express and enjoy both their faith and their sexual orientation. Many at times find themselves conflicted by their faith because it feels contrary to their sexuality and sexual orientation. An example is the case of Rose that is presented below on the dilemma of questions she asked herself about her sexuality and her belief in religion. However, in *Sex, Sexuality and Therapeutic Practices*, authors Catherine Butler and Angela Byrne states that even though faith and religion can have a negative impact, especially for those within the LGBTI community, it does not change their religious beliefs. In a Bible passage quoted by religious leaders, it says that God came to help the sinners and the sick, not the well,

“Jesus said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.””(Mark 2:17)

Here, she views the sinners and sick as the LGBTI community or any other person who believes that he

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<sup>33</sup> Terry Brown, *“Other voices other worlds: the global church speaks out on homosexuality”* (New york, Church published incorporated, 2012) 158-168.

is different and is rejected by society<sup>34</sup>.

Despite the anti-gay messages that circulate daily in Cameroon society, many brave activists and lawyers still fight for tolerance and better living conditions for the LGBTI community. In 2003, prominent activist and lawyer Alice Nkom started the Cameroon Association of Defense for the Homosexuals (ADEFHO), the first above-ground organization working to provide services for the LGBTI community. After meeting LGBTI tourists who visited Cameroon and had a poor experiences because of their sexual orientation, Nkom chose to address the situation given that she was already working in the field of human rights<sup>35</sup>. Her support for the cause has shown a path of hope, and helped the LGBTI community in Cameroon to unify and fight for their own protection and, a blossoming future. Though this community has unified thanks to ADEFHO, the struggle continues because the association is limited by the government's denial of formal registration as a standard organization<sup>36</sup>. Such acts of denial demonstrate once again the participation of the Cameroonian government in indirect and direct discrimination toward the LGBTI community, which in my opinion violates the international law of human rights. The government's refusal to grant legal status to ADEFHO has nonetheless helped the LGBTI community by bringing the crisis to the attention of the international community. Recently, “Born This Way” a United States-produced documentary about anti-gay violence in Cameroon, captured the attention of both Cameroonians state officials and United States ambassadors at the screening they had for the release of the documentary, and brought them to the table to revisit the status of homosexuals

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34 Taylor and Francis, Culture, Health & Sexuality An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care

35 Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (Yaounde-San francisco), September 20, 2013.

36 Dominique Menoga interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (France – San Francisco), July 31, 2013  
Dominique Menoga, founder of the CAMFAIDS organization, during his interview discusses about six other associations that do some types of work with the LGBTI community in Cameroon. Yet all these organizations or associations are legally registered because they front face mission is educating on HIV/AIDS, STD's etc and below ground provide some types of support to the LGBTI community. Unlike ADEFHO which from the start has portrayed the true meaning of their goal and ambition within the community, he also believe that, it is the reason why the government is reluctant to give them legality given that they are against homosexuality and even have laws that prohibits “such acts”. Alice who during her interviews as well mentioned the same and also stated that she has been working so hard until this day to have that changed and see if the government could grant the organization legalization.

and how that is affected by government policy. Though anti-gay violence and abuse continue to grow, homosexual issues and homophobic attitudes in Cameroon will one day face their own Stonewall as New York city had in 1969, or as Johannesburg did in 1966. Perhaps from there on the trajectory will change significantly and a better outcome will result<sup>37</sup>.

## **Literature Review**

In the following section I look at a wide range of literature discussing the effect of colonialism on attitudes toward homosexuality, how this contributes to violence, and the impact of political movements and education on this subject. These different themes represent the source of problems LGBTI people face in Cameroon. They are all interconnected. My aim is to clearly illustrate that connection and the role it plays in resolving the question of how to raise the voice of the LGBTI community regarding living conditions, violence and other concerns, and to propose strategies for better serving the community.

### **A) The concept of Sexuality & Sovereignty in Africa**

Important to this discussion is Charles Gueboguo's work "*La question homosexuelle en Afrique, le cas du Cameroon*." In his book, Gueboguo touches on important factors that affect the status and situation of LGBTI groups in Cameroon, and Africa at large. He asks the question Is Africa homophobic? Gueboguo believes that Africans should examine the anti-homosexual bias that permeates the continent, and asks how this prejudice might be mitigated in order to eliminate anti-gay discrimination and violence<sup>38</sup>. Gueboguo brings up this concept of "Africaness," he defines as the notion of authenticity and uniqueness Africans would like to preserve in regards to the western world. Not only does he argue that "Africaness" is an extremely important concept for Africans to embrace, but also suggests that homosexuality is a result of colonialism. In the course of

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37 Marc Epprecht, "Sexuality and social justice in Africa: Stonewall", (London, New York, Zed Book, 2013) 150 - 151.

38 Charles Gueboguo, "*La question Homosexuelle en Afrique: Le cas du Cameroon*". (New York: l'harmattan, 2006), 1-188  
<http://www.voanews.com/content/cameroon-homosexuality-human-rights-watch/1626171.html>

globalization, Gueboguo argues that Africa has lost everything. All they have left is their Africanness or “authenticity”, which is sometimes expressed by the rejection of homosexuality or by embracing the concept of sovereign masculinity. As seen by Frantz Fanon and other scholars, sovereign masculinity has presented African men as ultra masculine, which in a way derives from ideas such as Edward Said's essay in Wail S. Hassan's article *Gender and Imperialism: Structures of Masculinity in Tayeb's Salih's Season of Migration to the North* which discusses “masculine Europe dominating the feminine orient.” Such ideology was the basis for colonialism and consequently pushed Africans to see themselves as such.

Today, Gueboguo writes, this sovereignty is in jeopardy due to an increase in the number of people willing to show their true identity as homosexuals. Cameroonians and other Africans value that “authenticity” not only because homosexuals are rejected by the Christian church (the number one tie to their culture)<sup>39</sup> but also because homosexuals are perceived to be feminized and presented as weak. Gueboguo argues that Africanness is primarily a political identity. Because the continent is so poor, it looks to gain control over something. One example we can examine is Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize of 2011. Sirleaf refuses to dismantle the existing anti-sodomy law, while also refusing to sign two new bills that would toughen laws on

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39 Dominique Menoga interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (France – San Francisco), July 31, 2013

Dominique Menoga Interview transcription: D’abord ce qu’il faut que je te dise, c’est que le Cameroun est un pays laïc mais l’église catholique est majoritaire et est beaucoup écoutée de la population. Jusqu’en 2005 il n’y avait pratiquement

pas d’arrestations ou de violences envers les personnes homosexuelles, mais suite à la communication de Monseigneur Tonye Mbakop — à l’époque évêque parce qu’il vient de démissionner — qui avait un discours homophobe, qui appelait à la haine contre les homosexuels. Et ses homélies qui étaient écoutées parce que c’étaient des homélies notamment du 25 décembre, des grandes fêtes au Cameroun, cela a porté à l’expansion de l’homophobie au Cameroun. Et cela se répercute également au niveau des familles. Je te prends un exemple : je suis issu d’une famille vraiment vraiment chrétienne : mon père est ancien délégué chez les adventistes. Ce qui fait que quand on entend de tels discours des hommes de Dieu, qui ont quand même un pouvoir religieux, et même un pouvoir politique assez puissant, il est probable que la famille et les parents qui sont les parents catholiques, protestants, évangéliques, ne reflètent ou ne translatent que cette haine qu’ils écoutent chez des hommes, chez des enfants qu’ils soupçonnent d’être homosexuels. Voilà l’atmosphère, le religieux qui règne au Cameroun et c’est même cette atmosphère qui est l’origine de l’homophobie au Cameroun.

Here he is asserting that catholicism is the number one religion in Cameroon, thus plays a vigorous task within the culture and also discussed about the influence that leaders of the religion has on the population in General.

homosexuality<sup>40</sup>." One can therefore conclude that she favors the continued criminalization of homosexual acts, and is quite happy with the ongoing persecution of LGBTI people. "We like ourselves just the way we are," Sirleaf said on March 19, 2012. "We've got certain traditional values in our society that we would like to preserve."

Gueboguo once again questions this idea that Africa is homophobic. Because the media rarely addresses the subject of homosexuality, the public is left to speculate if a person that looks gay and is gay. Cameroon teenagers who know they are gay will hide their sexuality and try to live a heterosexual life. Also, given the fact that most LGBTI people in Cameroon lack the same opportunities and potential income as the rest of the society, Gueboguo writes, gays often become prostitutes<sup>41</sup>.

Peter Geschiere also touches on the cultural aspects in relation to the violence and abuse of homosexuals in Cameroon. Due to the increase in poverty, corruption, and homophobia, the hunt for homosexuals has become a "pastime" both for the police and for members of the general population as well. Given the government's harsh proscriptions, some private citizens exploit that prejudice by blackmailing or threatening to denounce someone as homosexual, simply because that person appears more feminine or masculine than is normal for their gender. In a country where corruption is endemic, we also see public leaders and members of the social elite who participate in homosexual acts but are never confronted by the law because of their status. Geschiere quoted the Anecdote Newspapers (a daily newspapers which dedication is to inform the community on the recent actions of the government or other Cameroonians leader), reporting on leaders and elite of the country, who

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40 Charles Gueboguo, "La question Homosexuelle en Afrique: Le cas du Cameroon". (New york: l'harmattan, 2006), 1-188  
 Tamasin Ford & Bonnie Allen, "Nobel peace prize winner defends law criminalising homosexuality in Liberia"  
 The Guardian News, March 19, 2009.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/19/nobel-peace-prize-law-homosexuality>

41 Charles Gueboguo, "La question Homosexuelle en Afrique: Le cas du Cameroon". (New york: l'harmattan, 2006), 1-188.



demand sexual favors from young adults of the same gender in exchange for a particular post.<sup>42</sup>

Geschiere believes that religion, the number one cultural aspect of Cameroon is the greatest source of anti-gay prejudice. He discussed the attacks that the Archbishop Mon Seigneur Victor Tonye Bakot incited against homosexuals, and blames the European union and the International Human Rights Organization for the increase of homosexuality in Cameroon and the rest of Africa<sup>43</sup>.

## **B) The Impact of Colonialism**

Robert Aldrich in his book “*Colonialism and Homosexuality*” talks about homosexuality in the lives of painters, poets, businessmen, political activists, and different men all around the globe. Although many cultures attempt to blame or associate homosexuality with colonialism, he writes, it is not true because homosexuality has been part a fact of life in multiple countries in all parts of the world. In the latter half of the book, he looks at this phenomenon region by region (Papua New Guinea, North Africa, South Asia, etc). Aldrich reinforces his credibility by offering testimony he gathered from homosexual men in different occupations and in various places of the world, and writes that the majority of critiques of post-colonialism were actually written by gay men. Some of these critiques argued that sexuality was viewed only through its biological aspects, instead of the broader general view of it. Many criticized Aldrich for not extending his analysis further to the tradition of cross- dressing and transvestism<sup>44</sup>. The author does a great job of clearly stating his argument by demonstrating a deep understanding of the past lives of homosexuals in the world, and deconstructing past notions about homosexuality. He concludes that:

“Colonial homosexual connections included both platonic friendships and hotly physical relationships, brief encounters and longer – lasting partnerships. Some European men sought European partners; other preferred natives. There was casual sex and abiding love, consensual pleasure and violent

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42 Peter Geschiere, “ Identity and Persecution” PhD diss in African Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam; 126 <http://dare.uva.nl/document/361873>

43 Ibid, Geschiere, 127-128

44 Robert Aldrich, “Colonialism and Homosexuality” (Routledge, New york: 2003) 176-186

abuse, unreciprocated longing and brazen seduction. There is no simple model of colonial homosexuality (p.406)<sup>45</sup>

For gay activists who list famous historical figures who were gay as a way of combating homophobia, this book will be a useful tool. This approach in relation to my question and search for better lives conditions and hopefully a repeal of certain laws that hinder the LGBTI community from evolving, I believe it shows the strength that gay writers and poets in the past had to prove in the past by accepting themselves for who they were.

In her book "*Vice Versa*," Marjorie Garber presented bisexuality as a "mere" sexual orientation and offers multiple arguments on the nature and influence of the term bisexuality along with its common usage in our society and culture. She posits bisexuality as the definition of "vice versa". She interprets it as two faces of the same coin, where the heterosexuality of the person is reflected on one side and the homosexuality of that person on the other. Bisexuality is often left out of the picture of sexuality, she writes, thus creating an impasse that we should try to recover since bisexuality is not just a medium between heterosexuality and homosexuality but something that exists beyond these two sexualities. She argues that bisexuality is the fundamental starting point of human eroticism and pushes readers to ask themselves if bisexuality is the third sexual orientation, or if it is actually the first and primordial identity<sup>46</sup>.

Garber demonstrated that many people who are labeled gay could more accurately be labeled bisexual. Her well-stated argument of how bisexuality should be viewed and understood is a spur to reflecting differently on sexuality and ceasing to view heterosexuality as the sole acceptable standard<sup>47</sup>. Garber's study brings up some points made by Charles Gueboguo, who said he has a difficult time understanding why Africans blame colonialism, and reject gay people by saying that homosexuality

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45 Aldrich, "Colonialism and homosexuality" 436.

46 Marjorie Garber, "*Vice versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday life*" (Penguin Group, Canada: 1997) 14-16; 43.

47 Stonewall project

<http://www.stonewallsf.org/>

came from the “white man”- while simultaneously enjoying iPods, big screen TV’s, luxury cars and much more that are also from the “white man”. He pushes the public and particularly the Africans to question their true standing points in life and discuss more about the real issues at hands.<sup>48</sup>

Mark Epprecht, using the lens of colonialism in regard to homosexuality, brings us back to the general concept of African sexualities which in many regions are still taboo, and argues that because this issue remains so secretive, many government officials take advantage of the situation by scapegoating homosexuality and ignoring important issues that the state and country should prioritize. Epprecht blames colonialism for making sexuality so taboo and supports his belief by stating that colonialists created a market for both female and male prostitution. Given that the slaves had no choice about who they had sex with, or who they were impregnated by, they developed a habit of secrecy – of keeping anything sexually related to themselves. Even today sexuality is a taboo and non-disputable subject between people. Epprecht stresses the importance of the younger generation in potentially changing these taboos significantly<sup>49</sup>.

In their book “*Boy-Wives and Female-Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*,” Will Roscoe and Stephen O. Murray attempt to clarify about the notion that homosexuality was imported to Africa by the Western countries. They discussed how supposedly importation has created many difficulties throughout the years until today for homosexuals, and emphasized on the importance of educating the people about sexual minorities so we can avoid drastic abuses and violence observed today. Roscoe and Murray strive to find the answer of what is sexuality is in Africa. Whereas Sylvia Tamale in “*African Sexualities*,” draws attention to the media and the way it promulgates conversations on sex and sexualities<sup>50</sup>. Roscoe and Murray present their views on the different perspectives from the anthropologic to the historic. They also discuss the visibility and reality of Europeans myths in African

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48 Charles Gueboguo, “La question Homosexuelle en Afrique: Le cas du Cameroon”. (New york: l'harmattan, 2006), 1-188.

49 Marc Epprecht, “Heterosexual Africa?: The history of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS” (Ohio University Press, Athens: 2008) 207.

50 Sylvia Tamale, “African Sexualities” a reader, (Pambazuka Press: Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi & Oxford, 2011) 13-145

societies, and the tendency of Africans to deny that homosexuality is embedded in their community and culture. Their book challenges these myths by showing evidence of same-sex marriage, cross dressing, and homosexuality, that existed but was hidden most of the time by LGBTI people for political reasons.<sup>51</sup>

### **C) Education Aspects**

In “*Challenging Homophobia: Teaching about Sexual Diversity*,” Barry Van Driel and Lutz Van Dijk focus more on education than the previous authors. More than any other author, they emphasize that youth is the audience that most needs to be educated about homosexuality. Their belief is that the sooner young people are introduced to sexuality and strategies on how handle differences in sexuality, the better equipped they will be as adults to incorporate broader views on the topic. They also discuss potential strategies that educators should learn in order to better arbitrate LGBTI issues brought to the class by teenagers. This method is significantly efficient because if Cameroon do have a younger generation well educated both on sexuality and homosexuality, this generation will later better embrace the LGBTI community due to the understanding they as children received from the base of their childhood/teenager years.

The authors believe that the best way of looking at homosexuality, especially in developing countries, is by introducing psychological and sociological processes to the classroom thereby challenging the “social ill” of homophobia.<sup>52</sup> They also believe that teaching sexual diversity, especially at a young age, is essential, especially when the subject of homosexuality in these communities is taboo.<sup>53</sup>

In Sylvia Tamale's book “*African Sexuality*,” Mansah Prah considers the many discourses on sexuality and gender and presents some ideas which she believes can improve education in African

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51 Will Roscoe, & Stephen O. Murray, “*Boys Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*”; New York: St. martin's press 1988.

52 Van Driel & Lutz Dijk, “*Challenging Homophobia: Teaching about sexual diversity*” Trentham books, 2007.

53 Ibid,

society, and ease the ideological biases against homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexualism and lesbianism. Prah's main belief is that a better education, especially sexual education will be a positive and effective route to take. In this book, she discusses: “how to give sex education as an aspect of preventive medicine, how to give advice in preparation for union (marriages), and also how to guide society to deal with the many sex-related problems that arise in community (Mace et al 1974)<sup>54</sup>.

Prah proposes instructional methods such as providing students with notes while talking such subjects as rape, homosexuality, and bisexuality and the offering of art classes where different gender and sexual-orientation roles can be represented. For instance, she recommends placement of a jar in the classroom, where students could drop questions they have about gender, sexuality, or anything else. She also suggests trips to visit people or places with some type of sexuality or homosexuality reputation; for example visiting a city like San Francisco where homosexuality has been “accepted” by all<sup>55</sup>.

#### **D) Movements on the Path of LGBTI Rights**

Linda Hirschman, a Supreme Court lawyer and political pundit, describes the long and shaky path the LGBTI movement had to travel to reach the level of equality that we see today in the western world; here specially she presented the case of the United States. In her first chapter, *Gays and the Cities: Community First, Politics Later*, she describes a man and women who just moved San Francisco in the early 1900's and find for the first time in their lives, a large number of people just like them. This especially has a crucial importance in the reading in my opinion because it portrays the foundation of belief, the discern that help them realize that there aren't the first and that many have been in their position; which eventually will push them to join them and hopefully

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54 Sylvia Tamale, “African Sexualities” a reader, (Pambazuka Press: Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi & Oxford, 2011) 591.

55 Mansah Prah: “Instructional method of bringing sexuality within education and especially within the classroom” in African Sexuality by Tamale, (Pambazuka Press: Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi & Oxford, 2011) 590-592

together work for better circumstances. Over the ensuing decades, she chronicles their joy of discovery, their fear of being discovered and their self-organization in responding to threats on to their lives. Eventually, she illustrates their standing of what it meant to be a good American, reframing morality and the standards of citizenship to embrace gays and lesbians.<sup>56</sup> This brings us back to the fact that, in Cameroon, many LGBTI people feel left out, unloved and without a sense of belonging. But by meeting people who are like them, who experience the same challenges – as many do within organizations such as Alternatives Cameroon or CAMFAIDS – they once again have hope, and start to appreciate the life they have, living in Cameroon.

As Robert Aldrich does in his writing, Hirschman debates about the Stonewall Uprising: and the small amount of respect gays finally received after that watershed event in the gay-rights movement. At Stonewall, a gay bar in New York City's Greenwich Village, homosexuals stood up for themselves and revolted against the police harassment they found unacceptable. This today appears to be one of the major points that have geared the position of LGBTI to what it is within this United States society.<sup>57</sup> The reader sees the early progress of the Gay Liberation Movement, from the first living-room meetings when gays and lesbians gathered to discuss the rights they were entitled to and their strategies for obtaining them. Hirschman shows how activist groups across the country built the community as a whole. She tends to minimize certain facts, however, referring for example to LGBTI as “a tiny community”, which contradicts what scholars say of the LGBTI community not being a small community, but instead and found all around the world. She asserts at one point that the gay rights movement achieved more traction than the racial civil rights movement, which is probably inaccurate, given that racial discrimination is forbidden today in every state, while discrimination on sexual preferences is not.<sup>58</sup>

56 Linda Hirschman, “Gays and the Cities: Community first, Politics Later” in *Victory: the triumphant Gay revolution* (New York: Harper, c2012 1<sup>st</sup> ed) 1.

57 Hirschman, “Stonewall Uprising: Gays Finally Get Some Respect” in *Victory: the triumphant Gay revolution* (New York: Harper, c2012 1<sup>st</sup> ed) 95.

58 Hirschman, “*The Civil Rights March of our generation*” in *Victory: the triumphant Gay revolution* (New York: Harper,

In her book “*Out in Africa*,” Ashley Currier, studies activism in Namibia and South Africa. After hearing and seeing reports of different efforts to pass new laws that will condemn homosexuals, Currier decided to look at the different methods of organizing and improving the living conditions of the LGBTI community both in Namibia and in South Africa. Currier believes “Visibility is a matter of social and political relevance”<sup>59</sup>. One of the points she makes is the lack of any reaction from international organizations when homosexuals in Uganda were being punished with death sentences; or when the South African Lesbians were abused and raped; or when laws punishing same-sex actions relations with forced labor were also enacted; or when a Ugandan LGBTI activist was murdered. Today one feels the same frustration when we see the lack of reaction to the murder of Eric Lembembe in Cameroon.

Currier does a great job of addressing factors that influenced mobilization on a local, national and international level. She points to the subject of homosexuality in a socially constructive way, and notes that homosexuals are visible at times, due to the input their input in our society, and yet invisible at other times, given the necessity to hide their true self on a regular basis.<sup>60</sup>

Neville Hoad, in “*African Intimacies*”, presents the concept of “decolonizing” the body, where he seeks to find out the true meaning of masculinity in relation to certain aspects of homosexuality. Here he reminds us of Aldrich, who discussed the belief of many Africans that homosexuality is a foreign product that was brought to their land by the white man.<sup>61</sup> In “*White Man’s Burdens, White Man’s Disease: Tracking Lesbian and Gay Human Rights*”, Hoad focuses more on the southern region of Africa and discusses how LGBTI rights have evolved into what they are now today. He discusses the way community leaders are portrayed in the media as part of the

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c2012 1<sup>st</sup> ed) 323.

59 Ashley Currier, “*Out in Africa: LGBTQ Organizing in Namibia and South Africa*” (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London: 2012) 18.

60 Ashley Currier, “*Out in Africa: LGBTQ Organizing in Namibia and South Africa*” (University of Minnesota Press: London, 2012)

61 Neville H. Wallace, “*African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*” (Minneapolis: university of Minnesota press, c2007) 21-26

LGBTI community. In the case of Zimbabwe, he argues that the image of Mugabe in a Marie Antoinette costume showed the relation between the gays and the peasant; which here was presented both as an art piece but also as an indicative sign of protest for those who understood better the problematic situation that was taking place at the time. Given that Hoad fails to analyze the concept of nationalism in his work, he struggles between the imperatives of modernity and economic development. He wants to shed light on how various cultural factors have touched on LGBTI rights in southern Africa together with racial aspects within the LGBTI community. He mentions that being a white African allowed him access to places and resources that a “normal, regular or black” a South African would not have. He clearly wants to address the question of race along with sex and sexuality in the larger context of globalization.<sup>62</sup>

In my following case studies I also address the fact that racially mixed homosexual couples are less targeted and persecuted by both the government and the public. One reason of that, said lawyers Alice Nkom and Michel Togue in interviews with me, is that a mixed couple usually has one person who is European. Because of his or her nationality or economic status, it is quite hard to abuse them or perpetrate an act of violence.<sup>63</sup>.

### **E) Penal Code and the Legal Rights of LGBTI**

Cameroon is an active member of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which clearly prohibits discrimination and arrests based on the sexual orientation. This demonstrates to outsiders and other nations that the country is willing to obey the law and be held accountable to the laws and rules these covenants and conventions protect<sup>64</sup>. However, given the multiple atrocities that have occurred within its capital and beyond, we see that the government is in fact

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62 Wallace, “African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization” (Mineapolis: university of Minesota press, c2007) 69-75

63 Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (Yaounde-San francisco), September 20, 2013.

64 Neela Ghoshal, “Guilty by Association; Human rights violations in the enforcement of Cameroon's anti-homosexuality law” (Human Rights Watch: March 2013)



in violent of the laws indicated in these conventions to protect human rights. The preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon signed on 1996 and the African (Banjul) Charter on Humans and People Rights adopted in 1981, grants each citizen the right to expression, the right to religion, thoughts and conscience; the right to liberty and security; and also the right to privacy and freedom of from discrimination<sup>65</sup>. Article 3 of the African (Banjul) Charter states that every individual shall be equal before the law and every individual shall be entitled to equal protection of the law<sup>66</sup>. Nonetheless, the penal code, another important part of Cameroon law, contradicts directly the preamble as well as the African (Banjul) Charter by eliminating privacy rights and permitting the discrimination that supposedly is forbidden by the state.

Section 347 bis of the penal code states: “

Whoever has sexual relations with a person of the same sex shall be punished with imprisonment for six months to five years and a fine of 20, 000 to 200,000 Francs CFA.”<sup>67</sup>

How can a government willfully abuse its own population and still expect the same people to abide to the rules? This action of the government grants criminals implicit permission to continue their violent acts, knowing they will not be punished, but instead rewarded with immunity. Cameroon creates and sustains this hatred toward homosexuality and chooses to ignore the basic human rights of a large segment of its population. In the Civil Ordinance of Cameroon, it says:

“No marriage may be celebrated: if the spouses-to-be are the same sex.”<sup>68</sup>

This demonstrates that fundamental rights cited in the Constitution

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65 The Preamble of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon ( Law, No. 96?06 of the 18<sup>th</sup> January 1996) provides throughout his entire document restriction on the abuse and discrimination of a person religion, thoughts, conscience, right of security, liberty, privacy and also expression.

66 African (Banjul) charter on Human and People's Rights, adopted June 27, 1981, OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/67/3rev.5,21 I.L.M. 58 (1982), entered into force Oct. 21, 1986: (excerpts).

67 Cameroon Penal Code; Section 347 of the code states that whoever has sexual relations with a person of the same sex shall be punished with imprisonment for six months to five years and a fine of 20.000 to 200.000 Francs.

68 Article 52 (3) of the civil Status Registration Ordinance of Cameroon provides that no marriage maybe celebrated if the spouses-to-be are of the same sex.

“The right to equal rights and obligation, the right to settle in a place and to move about freely, the right to protect and promote family”  
are being violated<sup>69</sup>. The recent silence of Cameroon and its officials makes it clear to the international community that they are giving a green light to more violence. Human Rights Watch (HRW), through its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) has accused the government of inaction following the death of Cameroonian LGBTI defenders activist Eric Lembembe.<sup>70</sup>

We can then conclude that the Cameroonian government is totally fraudulent of its own law, by cheating its people and persecuting LGBTI citizens who are only requesting their basic rights as fellow citizens. The preamble to the Constitution of Cameroon states:

We, people of Cameroon declare that the human person, without distinction as to race, religion, sex or belief, possesses inalienable and sacred rights; Affirm our attachment to the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Charter of the United Nations and the African Charter on Human and people rights, and all duly ratified international conventions relating thereto, in particular, to the following principles:

All persons shall have equal rights and obligations. The State shall provide all its citizens with the conditions necessary for their development,

The State shall ensure the protection of minorities and shall preserve the right of indigenous population in accordance to the law: “

Freedom and security should be guaranteed to each individual, subject to respect for the rights of others and the higher interests of the State<sup>71</sup>”

And the International Covenant on civil and Political Rights which states in Article 2(1) that: “

Each state party to the present covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its Jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.<sup>72</sup>”

69 The Preamble of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon ( Law, No. 96/06 of the 18<sup>th</sup> January 1996) provides throughout his entire document restriction on the abuse and discrimination of a person religion, thoughts, conscience, right of security, liberty, privacy and also expression.

70 Neela Ghoshal, Human Rights Watch: Does Cameroon Support violence against LGBTI people?  
[Http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/12/dispatches-does-cameroon-support-violence-against-lgbti-people](http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/12/dispatches-does-cameroon-support-violence-against-lgbti-people)

71 The 1996 Preamble of the Constitution of Cameroon states that:  
“.....affirm our attachment to the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and all duly ratified international conventions relating thereto....”

72 Article 2 (1) of the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides as follows:  
“each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and

We observe that both documents stated clearly the role of the state as a shield protector for all its citizen no matter their differences. The fact that the government will go against formal documents as the Constitution and the Civil Ordinance to perpetrate certain citizens using discrimination or allowing religious leaders to promote anti-homosexual behaviors goes entirely against these documents showing the liability and credibility of the people in reign. Further actions by the State with coordination of the Church has caused many to have troubling questions such as: How can religion which is supposed to be base on love and compassion be fully enclosed and used to defend hatred, tyranny and persecution? How can the freedom of privacy be maintained when people are assaulted and harassed both by anti-homosexual groups and by government officials? What is the role of the state and are they standing behind it? In brief what is the purpose of such documents of law if the enforcers ignore those laws?

Here also, we observed this impunity of the government towards those who think it is in their right to discriminate towards LGBTI Cameroonians. A great part of this exemption of punishment and contradiction to the written constitution is the Article 347 bis, written once again illegally from the discussion with lawyer Alice Nkom. This Article allows perpetrators in Cameroon to plan and commit acts of violence towards other groups of people knowing that they can not be punished. In addition, even if they were to get caught in act, simply mentioning that the reason they perpetrated the act is because the victim is homosexual; will allow them to walk away with no punishment from the law. This Article thus gives them more reassurance and validates completely their actions<sup>73</sup>. An example of this impunity is the case of Jean Claude Mbede who was arrested and faced prison time, abuses, and unsanitary Conditions. The only evidence law enforcement brought to the table and which sentenced him to years of imprisonment was a love text to another man, which in their eyes made him homosexual therefore

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subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex. Language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

73 Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (Yaounde-San francisco), September 20, 2013.

punishable<sup>74</sup>. Law enforcement based their arrest on the statement written in the penal code, Article 347 bis of Cameroon penal code forbids sexual relations not texting or anything else of the sort. Here this shows how contradictory the law enforcement can be in regard to its own constitution and the reason why many are exempt from punishment.

### **Methodology**

Recently as discrimination and atrocities increased in Cameroon, I was invited by a friend to view “Born This Way” a documentary showing the status and living conditions of the LGBTI community in Cameroon. Given that I was in the process of researching this thesis and wondering how I could participate in creating a more tolerant Cameroon, I decided to see the documentary. From there an avalanche of events started taking place. “Born This Way” portrays young Cameroonians gays and lesbians and illustrates their suffering, abuse desperation and day-to-day struggles. The film reveals the devastation of homophobia, the strong influence of Western culture, and a destabilized government that perpetrates and permits anti-gay violence. Tears came down to my eyes, first because I was witnessing direct and vivid evidence of what was happening on the ground; second because I am not at home in Cameroon and have a nostalgic longing for this beautiful land; and lastly and most importantly, because the people in the documentary were extremely courageous in showing their faces and discussing these issues, knowing well the punishment it could bring to them. In most documentaries about homosexuality in Africa, the faces of gays and lesbians are hidden; in “Born This Way” we see them initially in shadow or silhouette, and then without any veil or filter. We can feel their strength and suffering as they recall the full horror of what have happened to them and remind us of the situation they still endure<sup>75</sup>. After the documentary, my goal was to conduct unique interviews that will help me develop outstanding case

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74 Colin Stewart, “The Human toll of 76 countries anti gay laws. The struggle repeal them” from Erasing 76 Crimes August 16, 2013

<http://76crimes.com/tag/jean-claude-roger-mbede/>

75 Born This Way, directed by Shaun Kadlec, Deb Tullmann. Release on 2013; Rose 30:32 min; Rameau 35:47 min

studies that follow the model of the people in the documentary while telling the story of LGBTI in Cameroon.

In the development of the Case Study, I will present documentation of my discussion and interview with Dominique Menoga founder of the CAMFAIDS association, lawyers Alice Nkom and Michel Togue, “Born This Way” film producer Deb Tullman, and two homosexuals Cameroonians who fled Cameroon and relocated to the United States due to their sexual orientation. I will examine the role of the government in regard to observing the law of the constitution; the role of Church in perpetuating anti-LGBTI discrimination; the reaction of families to gay and lesbian children; social attitudes in the scholarly domain and the workplace; and efforts by the LGBTI community to preserve their identity and survive oppression.

Due to safety and personal concerns, the people sharing their life experiences requested anonymity, which I agreed to by giving them the pseudonyms “Rose” and “Rameau.” Lawyers Nkom and Togue working with the LGBTI community in Cameroon, and film producer Tullmann, embraced my inquiry and gave me their consent to use their actual names. All the interviews took place in the United States. I believe that interviewing these people gave me a broader prospective on the subject matter. Throughout the process I tried to focus on the broader theme of my argument, which is the reasons for anti-LGBTI violence in Cameroon, and the government's participation in this violence.

This report was formulated by myself. Five of the interviews were conducted in French, and one in English all by myself. All the interviews were voluntary. No one was paid for providing any type of information during those interviews. The interviews took place in September, October and November of 2013. Two of the interviews were done via a mode of telecommunication (Skype) and the rest were done in person. The names of the majority of the interviewees are provided.

One limitation of this research is that it was a secondary research, which means I did not have the opportunity to go to Cameroon to collect information on the ground.

## **Case Study I**

### **1) Rose (pseudo name given to my 1<sup>st</sup> interviewee)**

Born and raised in a small city of Cameroon, “Rose” grew up with a single mother, hardly knowing her father. At the age of 6, she was put in a convent for nuns. Years later, due to the absence of her father in her life, she grew this strong desire and passion, for care and understanding of younger children, which she believes came from the feeling she had as a child: of wanting someone there for her, to talk or to look up to<sup>76</sup>.

Throughout her childhood, she spent a significant amount of time with one of her best friends. Rose clearly remembers the moment when she first realized her attraction to the same-sex as she describes it to me: “

One day, while we were playing this old game called house, where I was always the father and Marlise – my best friend – the mother, I spent time looking and admiring her during the house chores she was doing. At times we were even going to sleep and pretend the next morning that we did what parents do and we will wake up with a baby and that idea of being with my wife and our kid was really pleasant to me and I liked it a lot<sup>77</sup>.”

As Rose grew older her feelings and attraction for women amplified as well. One Sunday night on their way back from church, a group of young men around the Rose's age, approached Rose and her two friends and began to talk to them. The girls ignored them and kept on walking as the guys were getting even closer. One of the guys shouted to them “

Hey you all over there, you aren't talking or responding to us because you all are lesbians right?” Then one of the girl responded: “

What is lesbian? And just so you know I am not one of that. ”

Then the guy who at that time had already caught up with the girls asked them: “

Who do you think you talking too in such ways? And they started to assault and rape the three

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76 Born This Way, directed by Shaun Kadlec, Deb Tullmann. Release on 2013; During the part, 07:00 min,

77 Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (Yaounde-San Francisco), September 20, 2013.

girls<sup>78</sup>.”Rose fought and struggled, got hit on the head and the face multiple times, fell down on a rock and passed out. She woke up a week later on a hospital bed and learned that one of her friends died due to the assault and that the other was rushed urgently to the central hospital in the center of the capital city where she remains today, completely paralyzed. “Rose” was the only one of the three that survived the rape unscathed<sup>79</sup>.

When asked if she reported this incident to police officials Rose responded: “

No, I will never call the police; for what? And to tell them what?”

Rose said that government officials in Cameroon are the ones who condemn people with different sexual orientation, and participate more than the average man or women in the abuse and harassment of the LGBTI community. Also the fact that the law through the penal code condemns us to a sentence of 5 to 10 years of imprisonment helps them to abuse us and to maintain this strong feeling of fear among the LGBTI community and especially women in Cameroon. They know that it helps them control us in public<sup>80</sup>.

Even when you decide to call them, “Rose” said, when they (the police) arrive, and it is perhaps a case of rape, they ask you a protocol of questions that force you to either drop the whole complaint or reveal your sexual orientation. When your orientation is unveiled, you become in a way their property. She talks about friends of hers, both male and female who were abused and called the police. When the police found out that they were gay, they threatened to send them to 10 years of imprisonment, if they did not perform weekly sexual favors – which some are still doing today. The problem doesn't stop there: officials will tell their friends, who will take advantage of the situation to use you or blackmail you<sup>81</sup>.

Her family, who at the time did not know about her sexuality, felt compassion with her and

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78 “Rose” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Oakland, October 30,2013

79 Born This Way, directed by Shaun Kadlec, Deb Tullmann. Release on 2013; 32:30-33:50 min

80 Cameroon Penal Code; Section 347 of the code states that whoever has sexual relations with a person of the same sex shall be punished with imprisonment for six months to five years and a fine of 20.000 to 200.000 Francs.

81 “Rose” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Oakland, October 30,2013

assisted her on many occasions. If they found out about her homosexuality, however, she would be considered a complete dishonor to the family even if she was still in the hospital bed. Had she been married, “Rose” was told, maybe none of this could have happened because her husband would have been there to protect her. Even today, she has yet to tell her mother about her sexuality because the family is very opposed to the idea of one being homosexual. It would be a dishonor to the family and would bring shame to them. If neighbor families were to find out, they would consider Rose and her family as diseased and abnormal<sup>82</sup>.

The church has been a big part of her life, even though it seems the greatest adversary to people with different sexual orientations. “Rose” discussed the times she met several religious leaders who misinterpreted the Biblical verse of Sodom and Gomorrah telling her that it refers to God's wrath and condemnation of the LGBTI community which, she said, is not true. The verse in fact speaks of sex between family member, male and female without reference to same-sex attraction. “Rose” said she spent all her time in a convent, and read the Bible at great length. The Ten Commandments, she noted, does not refer to homosexuality. She strongly believes that religion itself does not condemn LGBTI people but rather it is powerful, homophobic religious leaders who do so. The credibility of the church has sunk so low, in her opinion, that more and more people are choosing not to participate in an institution that emphasizes judgment and exclusion rather than a just and compassionate God.

After she and her friends were beaten, and “Rose” endured other, less threatening incidents, she said, she decided to work for Alternatives Cameroon(AC). Founded by young adults in 2006, Alternative Cameroon is an organization that works to defend the rights of all sexual minorities. At AC, Rose was asked to facilitate talks, games, apprenticeships, and safe-sex discussions for gays and lesbians. Through her work at the agency, she became one of the subjects of the documentary “Born This Way”, in which she revisits her experience as a lesbian.

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82 “Rose” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Oakland, October 30,2013



A month later, “Rose” was invited to participate in the Outfest Los Angeles International film festival who took place in July where the documentary where the documentary were screened. To her surprise parts of the documentary got out and were seen in Cameroon while she was in the United States for the festival. From what Rose believed, anti-gay groups in Cameroon now knew her due to the film. Given the violence they administrated to those that were part of the Cameroonian sexual minority and her past experiences, she became afraid and lost interest in returning to Cameroon. She became frightened of going to a volatile and dangerous situation. Her escape route of escape was to remain in the United States and apply for asylum. “Rose” now resides in northern California, where she finds herself disoriented, not only because she is suddenly in a foreign country with a different culture and language, but also because she left behind the work she built in Cameroon. Lastly and most importantly, in my opinion, she left behind her only child which at her time of departure was only 6 months and who is now at risk of being abandoned.

## **Case Study II**

### **“Rameau<sup>83</sup>”(pseudo given to the 2<sup>nd</sup> interviewee)**

Rameau is a gay man who grew up in a city located South West of Cameroon called Edea. Being the youngest of 6, with 3 other brothers and 2 sisters, he had a relaxing and happy childhood beside both of his parents. At the age of 13, he experienced the toughest time of his adolescent years because it was the year that he became aware of his feelings and attractions to the same sex. During that period, he encountered lots of trouble because he was trying to fight these feelings and comply to the “norm” within Cameroonian society. At the age of 14, he had a big crush on his best friend “Garland<sup>84</sup>”. One day when alone at the house and giving that Garland was living in his neighborhood, Rameau invited him to come watch a TV show. After the show, small teasing took place here and there and: “

We were playing and jumping on top of each other and at a moment we kissed...if I remember

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83 “Rameau” name given to the interviewee in order to keep his identity anonymous

84 “Garland” pseudo name give to the best friend of Rameau to keep him anonymous

clearly we kissed quite a few times that day actually.<sup>85</sup>”

This was his first experience both of love and homosexuality. Later on, in high school and college, he decided to keep his sexual orientation secret, so though struggling, when he finished college he started exploring more that part of himself. Throughout that time he faced various discriminations, many of them verbal, but also several physical encounters took place. He remembers being insulted and called many names while walking in the street with friends. Another vivid memory of verbal abuse, was the time that he was working back from running errands and a group of people spat at him and when he thought they were going to stop one of them in the group came across with a bucket full of filthy liquid in it that they splashed all over him and continued to laugh while pointing at him. In the documentary, he shared about one time when he got assaulted by another man with a knife, who followed him on his way home and told him to stop bringing homosexuality in their neighborhood<sup>86</sup>.

The most recent attack happened this past May 2012 as he shared: “

On a Friday night, I was coming back from work and I decided to stop by my friends house to get a drink before heading home. After spending sometime with my friends, I decided to go home. On my way home, seven guys with sticks, wood log, belts approached me and started beating and left me quite unconscious laying on the ground.<sup>87</sup>”

A couple days later after this incident, on his way home tapped to his door was a note that stated: “

dirty gay, we know where you live, you can no longer hide, we will find you and no worry we will be back<sup>88</sup>.”

When asked about the measures or ways of coping he took after such incidents he responded: “

After the beating, I was so traumatized by all, that on a daily basis I tried to make it home before the sun came down, became a little paranoid and started watching over my shoulder in hopes of seeing

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85 “Rameau” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Sausalito, November 17, 2013.

86 Born This Way, directed by Shaun Kadlec, Deb Tullmann. Release on 2013; during part 41:36 min

87 “Rameau” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Sausalito, November 17, 2013.

88 “Rameau” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Sausalito, November 17, 2013.

something similar in advance and hopefully escape from it<sup>89</sup>. ”

He was so traumatized that he even talked in the documentary “Born This Way” about having a dream where he was enclosed in his place and all the neighbors came around and put fire around his house to kill him<sup>90</sup>.

Following the note on the door, he decided to relocate to a new place far away from that city, leaving behind, friends, family, job, house; basically abandoning the life he had built already there given that his live was in great danger.

He also shared with me that family was really important to him. Though his Father passed away in 2009, he remembers being really close to him and having a great father to son relation of course in the secrecy of his sexual orientation. In the documentary “Born This Way”, he said: “

My father was an outstanding man, but when he came to the subject of homosexuality, he was not tolerant, and hated any type of imagery represented or done between two people of the same sex<sup>91</sup>. ”

When talking about his mother, he mentioned how really close they are though she is not aware of his sexuality. One positive familial aspect for him is the fact as he said: “

I have been blessed to have at least one amazing brother.” His brother came and lived with him when he moved from Edea to Douala. Once after a long day of reminiscing on the situation and due to the frustration he had of not being able to bring friends home because they were a little more effeminate, he decided that it was time to come out to his brother. So he sat him brother down and said:

'Mazus<sup>92</sup>, I have to tell you something very important, and his brother Mazus looked at him and said: Rameau I know that you are gay and I accept you the way you are. Though we are leaving in this society and people have different thoughts and beliefs towards homosexuals, growing up with you and knowing you, I completely disagree with what they say because I know you and love you<sup>93</sup>.

However, he continued saying that weeks later after he came out to his brother, his brother came

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89 “Rameau” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Sausalito, November 17, 2013.

90 Born This Way, directed by Shaun Kadlec, Deb Tullmann. Release on 2013; During part 35:47 min

91 Born This Way, directed by Shaun Kadlec, Deb Tullmann. Release on 2013; During part 26:45 min

92 Mazus: name given to Rameau's brother also to maintain his identity anonymous.

93 “Rameau” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Sausalito, November 17, 2013.

back to him telling him that he met with their mother and that she had told the brother that she knew that Rameau was homosexual due to the fact that she has never once come to his house and found a lady friend there. The brother continued and said she knows that you are gay but she prefers to stay in this stage of mind set of not really knowing for sure given that you Rameau, had yet come out to her. I was then a bit confused because I wondered why she did not just accept her son and say, Rameau I know you are gay and I love and still accept you the way you are? He replied that he does prefer that she stay in anonymity because it protects her from assault. He elaborated by saying that being in anonymity keeps her safe from people who also assault parents of “sinners” (as they called homosexuals). The best for her he explained, given that people know she is his mother – is to have her stay with the mind set of not knowing, so that no one will take advantage of that and use it against her. To have his brother at his side represents the world to him and mostly confirms to him that there is always a possibility of change regardless of the atrocities happening at the moment.

Then he shared with me one of the biggest challenges he had working at Alternative, which is quite relevant to my topic given that it touches on the subject of HIV/AIDS. Just like Murray and Roscoe discussed the importance of education in regards to both homosexuality and HIV/AIDS, Rameau shared how baffled he was while collecting data and listening to people that came in on the regular basis to get tested. He explained to me his hurt when he came to find out that in the larger city, about one in three gays was HIV positive, and the age range of the most affected was from 15-20. He decided to peer educate as well as passing out condoms and lubricant. One day throughout his visit, he shared: “

I was deeply hurt when I heard a young guy of 18 years old say that HIV can only be transmitted from a heterosexual sexual relation (meaning penis in the vagina).”

That encounter troubled him so much that he promised to himself to start an educational program within the association.

Similarly to Rose, he also mentioned the church as being the primordial factor that pushed on the

violence and attack of the LGBTI community. He also talked about the infamous incident of the archbishop Bakot, who preached in front of the pulpit that homosexuals were evil, and should be killed or banned from Cameroonian society. He stated that religion plays a crucial role since 26% of the community is Catholic and actively practice their religion<sup>94</sup>. He also added that poverty and unemployment are factors that promote homophobic attitudes in Cameroon. He mentioned, that: “

Gays are usually into nice things such as clothing and other, thus giving that their struggle to life and other, some figure out ways to still buy themselves good clothing, nice things etc...When seen by the population, this one believes and stereotyped that in order for them to get those nice things, they had to give sexual favor to a lot of people or in case of employment, they had to sleep with the directors so they could get the jobs. Reason why the population also hated gays because they think that gays just use they “bottoms” to get what they need compare to the rest of the society which is completely untrue<sup>95</sup>.

Rameau believes that government officials take advantage of the article 347 bis and utilize it incorrectly so they can manipulate the society through scapegoating. Not only they scapegoat the lesbian and Homosexual community, but many police officials and political figures abuse vulnerable gays or lesbians in the country below influence that if they were to deny giving them these sexual favors they will denounce them to authority he said.

He believed that his only way of escaping and living in a way his gay life freely was to work for an Non governmental organization (NGO) such as well for Alternative Cameroon which provides services for the LGBTI community and also provide HIV/AIDS testing for the community as a whole. There he met Rose along with many other friends with whom he could be free to express his sexual identity without fear of persecution. He also was asked to share his story and experience in the documentary “Born This Way” which he did and when asked what was his aspiration to show his face during such documentary, knowing the implications positive and negative that could have brought to his life, he responded: “

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94 Kees Schilder, “State Formation, Religion, and Land tenure in Cameroon” (African Studies Centre, Leiden: Jan 1988) 257.

95 “Rameau” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Sausalito, November 17, 2013.

I first did the documentary to change the mentality of the Cameroonians about this subject of Homosexuality. I wanted to show my face because people have mentioned and asked after viewing other videos on homosexuality, why is it that these “people”(homosexuals) will make these videos and then hide their faces? Why aren't they affirming who they are by showing their faces? So I wanted to be that person and affirm to the people that yes indeed there is a lot of homosexuals that are suffering and would like to put a stop to the atrocities. I wanted to show that homosexuals are not just the stereotypes that the majority describe throughout the community but instead are just like everyone else that work, play, go to church, go out, have siblings, a family and most of all have feelings like everyone and love as well<sup>96</sup>.”

Today, Rameau believe that his experience shared throughout the filming of the documentary was a key starts point for many Cameroonians LGBTI to understand that they can fight no matter what for their belief. Though he realized that this fight is not easy and is still at its beginning in Cameroon, he trust that help such as documentary like “Born This Way” will continue to pave a way to better life for the LGBTI community in Cameroon. He concluded by saying that if such opportunity was to be given again, his profound request will be to present “the hidden and struggled life” of many more LGBTI Cameroonians with their contrasts and similarity than just the life of two as it was in “Born This Way”.

### **Case Study III**

#### **3) Lawyers, Activists and Film producer views on the situation.**

“Alice Nkom, Michel Togue, Dominique Menoga & Deb Tullman”

Due to the numerous threats and acts of violence against the LGBTI community and its defenders of Cameroon, I wanted to know why these people are willing to sacrifice their career, family and life for this cause.

Alice Nkom, a Lawyer since 1968 and champion of the LGBTI cause since 2003, shared with me the two main reasons why she decided to participate in the cause. One she said: is the government's abuse of the law. Nkom recalled her frustration regarding Article 347 bis, which was supposedly to be voted by Parliament ultimately was not, and her displeasure with the President, who wrote the article in violation of the principle of separation of powers.

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96 “Rameau” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Sausalito, November 17, 2013.

Nkom said she was already fighting for human rights when she met a group of European men who were visiting Cameroon. During their encounter she noticed that some members of the group who were visiting were more than just friends, and accordingly advised them to be careful throughout their journey. When they left Cameroon sooner than expected telling her about the verbal assault they received, she promised herself and the departing group to fight against anti-LGBTI discrimination.<sup>97</sup>

Michel, also a lawyer that joined Alice in her fight against bigotry years later, followed the Human Rights path after his studies. After seeing such marginalization and discrimination in regards to this minority group, and given his previous work as an activist for human rights – , he decided to devote all his time for the cause of the LGBTI community in Cameroon.

Deb, best friend with Shawn, the other producer of “Born This Way” and her childhood friend, both met Steve Nemande, founder of Alternative Cameroon at a conference in Los Angeles. Through their discussions, Steve shared with them the story of this underground group of people in Cameroon working in providing services for the LGBTI community. Given their desire to produce a new documentary, they decided to visit Cameroon, where they meet both Rose and Rameau who already had a different perspective on the subject of homosexuality in Cameroon and with their help decided to produce and film the documentary.

Dominique, is one of the activists for the LGBTI cause and also an important of Alternative Cameroon. He started his activist work in 2005 when he got the opportunity to meet two great scholars who have written on the issue of sexuality and homosexuality in Africa – Charles Gueboguo and Joel Nana. Between 2001 and 2006 he decided to create the CAMFAIDS (Cameroonian Foundation for AIDS), that also provides services to the LGBTI community and has as its mission, to offer better life conditions to that sexual minority.

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<sup>97</sup> Dominique Menoga interviewed by Author, Tape recording, France – San Francisco, July 31, 2013.

Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Yaounde – San Francisco, September 20, 2013.

Michel Togue interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Yaounde – San Francisco, September 26, 2013.

Deb Tullman interviewed by Author, Tape recording, San Francisco, October 18, 2013.

Michel Togue and Dominique Menoga talked about their desire to work in the field of humanitarian aid, and the anti-LGBTI marginalization and discrimination that pushed them to devote their time to the homosexual cause. Menoga, who is gay, said he 's witnessed in Cameroon discrimination and violence.

Unanimously, when asked about the lives of LGBTI people in Cameroon today, everyone mentioned the horrific and unstable situation they observed there. The situation is very marginalized, they said, with many people and judged not by the laws, but by the homophobic attitudes entrenched in the society. Article 347 bis states that under the Cameroonian law can be sentenced to prison if caught practicing sexual relations with someone of the same sex. But in Cameroon, a person can be arrested and incarcerated simply because of their “feminine” appearance or for sending affectionate text messages such as the case of Jean Claude Mbede, who was arrested and incarcerated because of texting another male <sup>98</sup>.

The people I interviewed spoke about the death of the young LGBTI activist Eric Lembembe and said that a sustained atmosphere of violence is causing the LGBTI community to hold back to themselves and hide in fear to be murdered.

Nkom and Togue affirmed that within Cameroonian society, hatred for homosexuals derives chiefly from the religious establishment, the Catholic Church especially, but other denominations as well. They emphasized the fact that despite Cameroon being a secular country, many are subjugated to their faith and belief. Due to the preaching of certain religious leaders such as Archbishop Bakot, who characterizes homosexuality as a disease, a pest, an abnormality that needs to be driven out of society, violence against the LGBTI community in Cameroon is a grave persistent threat<sup>99</sup>. Lawyers and activists agreed that it is used politically as an official scapegoat to manipulate society. Nkom and Togue

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98 Chris Matyszczyk, “Gay-Love Text gets sender 3 years in Jail: A Cameroonian man texts another man: 'I am very much in love with you.'That is enough to get him sent to prison. An appeal hearing held yesterday confirms his sentence”. (CNET news, December 18, 2012),

99 Tris Reid-Smith, “Pope replaces Cameroon Archbishop who said gays destroy humanity” (GayStarsNews, July 31, 2013).



also believe that the situation had been kept this way with so much homophobic attitudes because of the lack of education on sexuality, sexual orientation and any other topics that touch on the subject of sex.

They all agreed that religion, because of the great importance it has in the life of many Cameroonians, should be teaching people how to love, accept and live with people who are different from them, instead of penalizing and judging them. The media, in their opinion, also plays a key role in promulgating violence and circulating false imagery and narratives that demonize minorities. Homophobic behaviors affect not only the LGBTI in Cameroon, they said, but the lives of everyone else when we view the situation from the standpoint of the fight against HIV/AIDS. The more these behaviors are encouraged the more we lose the fight against HIV because many homosexual who are afraid for their lives are then likely to hide, living clandestine lives and unwittingly spreading the HIV virus<sup>100</sup>.

When asked about threats they and their family received because they were allies and defenders of the LGBTI community, they affirmed that at times they are afraid. As Cameroonians and human rights advocates, they said they are committed to fighting no matter what obstacles they encounter. Though they all believe that anti-LGBTI violence stems from the fanaticism that sometimes accompanies extreme religious faith and patriotism. Menoga stated that in general is prevalent to Cameroonian society and should be opposed in all its manifestations.<sup>101</sup>.

Considering their longstanding work for the LGBTI community, I ask what they would recommend to remedy the situation. Education, they answered, along with the repeal of unjust laws, and

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100 Dominique Menoga interviewed by Author, Tape recording, France – San francisco, July 31, 2013.  
 Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Yaounde – San Francisco, September 20, 2013.  
 Michel Togue interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Yaounde – San francisco, September 26, 2013.  
 Deb Tullman interviewed by Author, Tape recording, San Francisco, October 18, 2013.

101 Dominique Menoga interviewed by Author, Tape recording, France – San francisco, July 31, 2013.  
 Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Yaounde – San Francisco, September 20, 2013.  
 Michel Togue interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Yaounde – San francisco, September 26, 2013.  
 Deb Tullman interviewed by Author, Tape recording, San Francisco, October 18, 2013.

a commitment to accuracy in the news media. Each of the people I interviewed said that Cameroon as a whole should be held accountable to international covenants and treaties. Menoga and Nkom said religious leaders could potentially alter public opinion and save lives by preaching kindness and forgiveness instead of hatred and intolerance.

When I asked Alice Nkom what she would recommend to the LGBTI Cameroonians, she said: “I will tell them to leave Cameroon and go to a more tolerant country.”<sup>102</sup> It was disturbing to hear this from a lawyer who sacrifices her life to combat prejudice, but her statement attest to the desperate nature of situation in Cameroon today. Migration might help resolve the suffering and pain these people face on the daily basis, but is realistically impossible given the lack of funds and resources that the LGBTI community has.

### **Analysis- Discussion**

Although Homosexuality is still criminalized in Cameroon, I believe there is a potential of making small changes that might eventually lead to a more tolerant society. After the interviews, research, and discussions with the various people, I realized that criminalization of LGBTI people's are framed as a “moral” issue. I believe this because the law punishes those who practice same-sex acts and not those who appear to practice it or who look insufficiently feminine or masculine.

The government scapegoats homosexuals and uses its persecution of this minority group to distract from other issues such as the lack of funds for education, unemployment and health care, and the corruption that infiltrates society and hinders it from developing. This brings us to the idea of Charles Gueboguo in his book “ La Question Homosexuelle en Afrique: Le Cas du Cameroon” and his discussion of sovereignty and the government's control over its population by speculating that they wish keep that authenticity that Gueboguo calls “Africaness” which distinguishes them, from the rest of the world. This also relates to the argument in Peter Geshiere's “Identity and Persecution” that corruption

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<sup>102</sup> Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Yaounde – San Francisco, September 20, 2013.

and violence of government officials increases poverty and discrimination and criminalizes this LGBTI community.

In addition, the government still applies laws such as Article 347 bis which was written by the president and not voted on by parliament like other laws, showing the controversy of the government against its own constitution and their tendency toward legal non conformity in Cameroon. Also, not only does the government deny funding to some of the country's HIV/AIDS center in both Yaounde and Douala and the only place where LGBTI people can get services and information, but also Cameroon's government denies legalization to organizations such as ADEFHO, which defends the rights of homosexuals in Cameroon. This is a terrible hardship for the LGBTI community, given that they are already deprived of most basic rights and services due to their sexuality.

Nkom and “Rose” opened my eyes to the ways in which the government of Cameroon contributes to the abuse and violence of LGBTI, arresting LGBTI people without fair cause and condemning them at times without a chance to trial. One of the most crucial things I realized in regards to the government of Cameroon is that there is no separation of powers, which in turn creates a myriad problems. Judges, for example, are afraid to do their job properly because of the potential reactions from the president that can cause them to lose their post; media outlets are forbidden to show documentaries or other programming about the LGBTI community without being closed down; Police officers and army of the country living under this major corruption where for example they require drivers with no legal papers or driving permits can bribe them and continue to circulate within the city without problem. As Pigeaud Fanny commented in his book, “Au Cameroun de Paul Biya”, such bribes received by officers on the street return to the hands of their superior, which at times reach the hands of close right hand man of the President. Basically no one but Paul Biya, who supposedly is overseeing a democracy, is allowed to discuss or oppose a view that he or the government has set up<sup>103</sup>.

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103 Pigeaud Fanny, “Au Cameroun de Paul Biya” Edition Karthala, 2011.

Rameau mentioned two key points, one being the love of family and the other being the safety of these family members. In regards to the love of family, he mentioned the love his brother brings to him and to his partner and how amazing and relieved he felt observing such actions. This particular situation in the case of Rameau does confirm the crucial importance of love ones especially when it comes to a matter such as homosexuality in Africa. Then when he shared his deep concern of safety and security for his mom to stay in the anonymity of his sexuality sounded fascinating at first because I really had a hard time visualizing this situation that way, but after some reflection it made clearly sense to me. I think using this method of ignorance to keep someone away from violence and abuse is a great and inoffensive idea; however, such behavior can still make one's child wonder why he is only being tolerated than being accepted by his own family. Family always plays an important part in Cameroon. Throughout my interviews I heard often that families will dishonor or disown a child for being homosexual. Given that acceptability in Cameroonian culture is completely defined by procreation and success in one's career, many LGBTI people regain the trust of their loved ones by succeeding in the career or by having a child – which allows their family to rethink their decision to disown.

Education is needed to better the situation for homosexuals in Cameroon, not just for the people that oppress the LGBTI people but also for the LGBTI community. The lack of education of young people, as witnessed by Rameau, where young men who are gay and have sexual relations are daily put in danger of infection. It is important to petition more help from the government given that the situation is no longer just a “homosexual” problem as many within the government view it, but an epidemic, where homosexuals who are forced to be “normal” adapted to a bi-sexuality and thus also having relationships with women partners. These situations put the whole society in danger one because the country allows polygamy, and two because of the infidelity of many that could have caused someone to contract the disease here and shared it over with his or her partner. I believe that these points made clear regarding the hardship that (NGO's) has to get the government to help them in any kind of way

especially if this help might target to participate in helping something or people that they (government) are completely against.

Another key issue is that the church and religious leaders of Cameroon are the chief reasons LGBTI people are abused, violated and rejected from their families. By condemning the LGBTI minority as evil, religious leaders perpetuates an increasingly unstable, unsafe atmosphere for the LGBTI community.

In term of support, Alice, Michel and Rose all emphasized the need for financial aid. For the LGBTI community to one day enjoy equals status in Cameroon, financial support will be needed to provide legal aid and to organize conferences where sexuality, sexual orientation and sexual transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS are discussed. This idea of aids for education bring us back to Sylvia Tamale's concept on discourse of sexualities and gender along with ideas she trust will help educate the African society on sexual orientation, sexual differences and homosexuality. Once again, all this is with the hope, of course, to move from an extreme conservatism country in my opinion, to a one a little more tolerant.

Another important point I believe might have a great impact in supporting the cause would be for LGBTI people who have lived somewhere else – in a country where homosexuality is accepted, where one can meet others of same sexual minority to share their stories, especially with the LGBTI communities outside of Cameroon that enjoy freedom and equality.

It is important to consider the concept of sexualities and the legacy of colonialism in Roscoe and Murray's book *“Boy-Wives and Female-Husbands: Studies in African Homosexuality.”* Contrary to scholars such as Roscoe and Murray, Ashley Currier and even Linda Hirschman, claim that Africans view homosexuality as a Western disease brought by the colonizer, most activists and LGBTI Cameroonians believe that in fact it is the church that perpetrates hatred and fear of the LGBTI community and not the influence from the West. Lawyer Alice Nkom affirms that despite the myth the

white man bringing homosexuality along with many other things, homosexuality was in fact a phenomenon every society long before the arrival of the colonizers. It is easier for people to put blame on the colonial era, Nkom says, than to educate themselves about homosexuality.

While talking to “Born This Way” film producer Deb Tullman about the actual involvement of the United States in this cause through its embassy in Cameroon, she told me: “The United States Embassy in Cameroon was very sympathetic and even screened the film within their office and invited several government figures to participate in the hope of persuading them revisit actions or laws that hinder the well being of this community<sup>104</sup>. ”

In addition, the US embassy has been very supportive of not only the cause for the LGBTI community in Cameroon, but also participates in helping the many human rights issues that are encountered within the country. The Politic newspaper states that US ambassador Robert P. Jackson in Cameroon is striving to create more opportunity for the Cameroonian people since his nomination in October 2010. So far, the embassy's biggest project has been the combat against HIV/AIDS where they dedicated millions to develop more strength in Cameroon Laboratories, provided more drugs that help prevent mother from passing the virus to their children, and also provided services to sex workers and to men having sex with men. Beyond the health field, the embassy also participates in providing linguistic programs and nutrition to young adults throughout the country, allowing them to maintain their academic course and learning about the multiple areas of careers they will encounter in the future job market<sup>105</sup>.

Clearly the US through its embassy is encouraging the elimination of the LGBTI persecution, the development of the Cameroonian society toward a brighter future and also participates in pushing the Cameroonian people to embrace more tolerant views.

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104 Alice Nkom interviewed by Author, Tape recording, (Yaounde-San francisco), September 20, 2013.

“Rameau” interviewed by Author, Tape recording, Sausalito, November 17, 2013.

105 Helder Toste; “An Interview with Robert P. Jackson US Ambassador to Cameroon” August 15, 2013 The Yale undergraduate journal of Politic.

<http://thepolitic.org/an-interview-with-robert-p-jackson-u-s-ambassador-to-cameroon/>

## **Recommendations**

After reviewing my research and the various interviews I conducted, I thought it would be more than effective to address different institutions with plausible and realistic recommendations. I strongly believe that Cameroon can reduce criminalization of the LGBTI community and foster equal rights for all people if these suggestions are implemented.

Given the interviews with Alice, Michele, Rose and Rameau, the Church in Cameroon seems to be the primary activist of anti-homosexual within the society. As Alice and Rose mentioned: Today in Cameroon, one of the best tools for educating the population about better acceptance and tolerance would be the preaching of religious leaders along with testimony that actually fulfill the primary goal of church instead of portraying evil. I then see these couples recommendations to be the most feasible to achieve.

To the church I will then recommend to reinforce the capacity building of leader's opinion, and to increase the involvement of religious leaders within the country to portray acts and deeds of tolerance, love, affection and acceptance. I truly believe that religious leaders, instead of creating disharmony--through the preaching of the Archbishop Mon Seigneur Bakot and many others--should promulgate love, tolerance and equality for everyone, irrespective of backgrounds and sexual orientation. The church should also collect funds throughout offerings that can go towards small NGO's that provide help and support to the LGBTI community; or towards financing lawyers and activists that work on LGBTI cases. As Dominique, Michel and Alice talked about needed funds that can help them better support the community in need. For example, when Alice mentioned her trip down to the east side of Cameroon where she was going to help to girls charged for homosexuality. At her arrival the two girls begged her to take them away from their village because they could no longer stay there due to the persecution. But unfortunately, she didn't have enough funds to relocate them to a new place at least in the mean time of the court process. Some other ways the church can come to help is by creating support groups within the

church institutions to provide food, clothing, shelter and other supports services members of sexual minorities who have been abused and oppressed can benefited from. The church can use progressive church leaders to periodically invite LGBTI activists to give a 10–15 minute speeches so their congregation can be exposed to the LGBTI issues.

Alice and Michel emphasized on the fact that repealing a law doesn't resolve the issue of homosexuality in Cameroon, but nonetheless affirmed that it will be a great start to have such laws repealed in order to better the situation of LGBTI in Cameroon. I then concluded to recommend the government to first repeal law section 347 bis of the penal code that criminalizes the LGBTI people for sexual activities and allows police to use such laws and provisions to arrest, abuse and detain LGBTI people. Repeal Article 52 (3) of the Civil Status Registration Ordinance of Cameroon, which prohibits any marriage between spouses of the same sex. This law, in my opinion, violates the right of privacy that appears in the Article 17 of the ICCPR. The government should suspend the punishment of LGBTI people that have been arrested for same-sex conduct when in reality they weren't caught doing so, and release them from prison. In addition, the government should also provide any denied legal documentation to organizations that want to create and provide services for the LGBTI community. As Alice discussed about her organization, ADEFHO was denied legalization until today and does not allow her to receive the benefits a legal organization approved by the government will receive. Also I believe that the prohibition of the government to refute such legalization to an association will help create more organizations that at their turn will create more awareness and possibly more safety nets for the LGBTI community. All examinations used by law enforcement that ostensibly determine a person's sexual orientation should also be banned (such as inserting supposedly "scientific material" or "object" in people's anal parts).

The government should ensure equal access to reproductive health services for all, as well as HIV/AIDS centers to preserve the health of the LGBTI Community in Cameroon. To reach this goal, I



suggest drafting a policy paper to guide health practitioners and doctors in the care of LGBTI people. In addition, education towards women is primordial to maintain their health safety towards husbands that might be living a bisexual life and teach women how to approach their husband to use condoms or to be checked before having sexual relations.

Dominique, Rose and Rameau, being part of the LGBTI community and having worked with Alternative Cameroon commented that funding NGO's that support LGBTI people is important and also that partnering with them will create even stronger bridges. These bridges will then allow these organizations better safety under the transnational support for NGO's and hopefully will keep them secure enough to function as long as they want and away from the social violence given that they are viewed as international properties. I strongly believe that recommending international LGBTI Organizations to create partnerships with local organizations such as HIV/AIDS service centers that provide services to the LGBTI community is not only very effective but also important to have for a community as Cameroon that is very shunned to various education curriculum in relation with sex or sexual behaviors. International organizations should also distribute funds to educate the population on transmittable diseases, educate them on safety and prevention, and prepare the LGBTI community for procedures to follow if they find themselves with a disease.

The fact that it is through a media outlet that I had the great opportunity to see the documentary “Born This Way”, and that by this same outlet many today have decided to join, help and fight for the cause of the LGBTI communities around the world, I believe that recommendations to the media is more than valuable. Though the media in Cameroon is owned by people in power connected to the government, the media should know that their importance and great value is well acknowledged by all and can be misinterpreted at times. The media should then increase and diversify their programs with both homosexuals and heterosexuals characters, views, opinions, characteristics etc. They should encourage exposure to LGBTI people and interaction with them. Some type of virtual integration may

be safer than face-to-face contact, especially in countries such as Cameroon where people are being murdered for being gay. Media outlets should incorporate TV programs, news reports and cartoons etc. A segment that shows other sexual orientations or that touches on the subject of homosexuality. For example, including a lesbian or gay couple in a TV series or cartoon. Through the media, especially today with the Internet, we can impart knowledge and tolerance to a younger generation. This is the most important audience we should try to reach, so that in the future they can be more aware and tolerant of their surroundings and environment. Given that in Cameroon the Internet is not as controlled as it is in some Asian countries, we should develop curriculum and programs, even video games, that encourage young people to be open and to see people who are different from the norm as human. In regards to education, all interviewees throughout the research talked about the indispensable need of being self educated as well as giving more education to help families understand better their children and facilitate the Cameroonian society to be more less radical regarding homosexuality. I think I will first recommend to educators, LGBTI allies and finally to LGBTI people that would like to help the situation in Cameroon. First I strongly believe that educators should create curriculum and programs that promote respect, understanding, love, tolerance and equality for all students, no matter their difference.

Second, LGBTI allies should put themselves in the shoes of an LGBTI person, especially those who have been victims of violence. For those that are willing to help, I would ask them to promote, in their home and workplace, activities that touch on other sexual orientations or that might help possibly closeted family members and co-workers to find relief and acceptance. Also I believe that allies should refuse to take part in actions, groups or programs that they would not want others to direct toward them.

Finally I will recommend to LGBTI people around the world in general to share their stories particularly those who live abroad where LGBTI communities are more accepted, and also to talk with friends and family about sexual issues that have taken place in the past especially those who have lived in a country where they were persecuted because of their orientation. Also I believe that sharing stories

within safe groups (locally), so that other LGBTI people might know what kind of danger might arise from a situation in what they find themselves. For example, “Rose,” one of my interviewees, describes a friend who was assaulted and raped. She then called the police. While asking questions, the police discovered she was lesbian. They proceeded to use that against her and forced her to have sex with them, sometimes two or three times per week. If she refused they would either arrest her or, more likely, kill her. Sharing this type of experience within the community spreads awareness so others can be prepared if similar incidents were to arise.

LGBTI people should choose wisely one family member to whom you can tell the whole truth about your sexuality, and know that she or he will support you though it isn't easy. That special person to whom you can say anything and know that, no matter how bad things get, he or she will always be there to take your hand. One major point that I hope the LGBTI community can take and seriously work towards is the goal to educate themselves both through online outlets or organizations. By being educated, a person knows that even though they might be going through difficulties and feel alone, at least somewhere in the world there is a place where people like me are accepted. Although African families mostly oppose homosexuality, and are likely to disown a gay or lesbian child, once they realize you are the way you are and you are still as successful as your heterosexual cousin or brother, they sometimes revise their decision and reach back out to their child again. This is a strong tool that LGBTI youth who have been rejected can use to their advantage to regain familial love. I also think that education allows one to see why the community that he or she lives in might not accept a person for whom he is and figure out a way to make them see you as a person. Being from the LGBTI community doesn't exempt a person from crying, loving, dancing and eating, etc – the same as everyone else on the planet. It's not that easy to come out to family, especially in the context of violence and danger to family members. This advice needs to be considered carefully, especially given the story of Rameau, his mother and fear of dishonoring. LGBTI individuals should also denounce any abuse and violence that happens

to you, at least within an organization that provides help for LGBTI people.

Aside all these recommendations and given the research and interviews I have conducted, I also think that there are several general recommendations that can also be of a great support to the LGBTI community. Eventually these recommendations come in indirect support to the plausible suggestions I have already mentioned and encompassing the multiple aspects of support discussed in the research, interviews and also my analysis. These targets being the church, the government, the United Nations or Human Rights Organizations, the media, educators, LGBTI allies and the LGBTI population all over the world. I will then suggest to keep Cameroon, which criminalizes and abuse of human rights, accountable. If that means cutting government aid in certain areas so that the government realizes the impact of its actions, I believe that is necessary. In the case of Cameroon, given our culture is quite embedded in sports such as football, a prohibition of participation in events such as the World Cup and Olympics could have a significant impact on the people of the country as well as the government.

Another idea is to target famous Cameroonian athletes, particularly those in the main sports supported by the majority of the population, to get involved in launching a campaign where very masculine Cameroonian athletes endorse LGBTI rights, and show the people there is nothing wrong with an alternative sexual orientation. This way, sports fans, who represent the majority of the population, would be forced to reconsider their prejudice once they see that athletes who embody the male “ideal” can be sympathetic to the LGBTI community. The country or the people of the nation can also pass laws and creates a means for reaching out communities that might be oppressed. Here I am leaning towards emergency funds given directly to groups or organizations in need. Put together as well programs that sensitize organizations on the human right issues concerning LGBTI persons

## **Conclusion**

The homophobic attitude encountered in Cameroon is a striking issue common to many countries of the continent. It hinders the ability of the LGBTI community to imagine and live a prosperous tomorrow.

Even African countries (such as South Africa) that protect their LGBTI community through their legal system still experience homophobia, though of course to a lesser degree than is rampant in nations such as Cameroon. Though many scholars have mentioned how homophobia in Cameroon or in Africa was influenced by the colonial and postcolonial era, I strongly believe that homophobia today in Cameroon and across the continent is much more nuanced and very driven by the influence of religious leaders and political figures<sup>106</sup>.

Scapegoating is nonetheless a recurring method used by many leaders all over the world. The use of such method allow us to relate back to the idea of Charles Gueboguo when it discussed sovereignty, power control of the government over its population speculating that they are striving to keep that authenticity that he named “Africaness” and in which they believe they could distinguish themselves from the rest of the world. Mark Epprecht’s “Heterosexuality in Africa” revisits this same idea of power, where he discussed the fact that, in the colonial era, we observed only the westerners having total power over the Africans and using as well in a way this scapegoat concept to get result and things they desired. He also presented their domination of power over African sexuality due to the corruption and blackmail that has created and made it to be a taboo subject until today throughout African society in general.

As Neville Hoad suggests, the first step in combatting homophobia is for Africans to stop viewing it as something un-African<sup>107</sup>. Religious leaders can help on this front by speaking out against homophobia and embracing the LGBTI people in their communities. Indeed, the political climate worldwide has shifted decidedly in recent years in favor of equal rights. Several nations now recognize same sex marriage, and the new Pope has helped create a new climate of tolerance within the Catholic community. The Pope demoted Archbishop Bakot after finding out that he had attacked the LGBTI community while

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106 Sylvia Tamale, “Out of the closet: Unveiling sexuality discourses in Uganda”, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 17-30

107 Neville Hoad, “Sex and Politics in South Africa: Introduction” edited by Neville H. (Cape Town: Double storey, 2007) 14-25

performing mass.<sup>108</sup> Actions like that will inspire other religious leaders to question the existence of homophobia within their own communities and work to oppose it. These leaders should actually organize mobilizations that can push governments to revise decisions made on certain issues that affect the LGBTI community. Here, the church can make use of its power and create small gathering where issues of the people and the community can be discussed as a whole. And given that the church in Cameroon has a voice, maybe the church leaders can use that voice to influence some decisions that the government might or might not want to take particularly when it comes to the theme of homosexuality.

I strongly believe that religious leaders play a crucial role in affecting public opinion and social change on this matter. If we look back at South Africa's Apartheid (known in the Afrikaans language as “Aparthess”), we clearly see the influence of Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, who strived throughout his life using the respect accorded to his position – to fight against segregation and in favor of equality. His dedication as a bishop demonstrates the potential for change when information is given that has the best interests of everyone within that country in mind. Similarly, we see the amazing work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States who fought increasingly against segregation in the United States. Throughout the civil rights movement, his inspiration shows us again the potential of religious leaders to influence public opinion and affect human rights for all. If most Cameroonian religious leaders were to adapt Tutu's or Dr. King's approach, I believe they could persuade many to reconsider their positions and eventually call for more tolerance<sup>109</sup>

In addition, the violence over gender roles goes beyond LGBTI issues and should also be addressed as gender violence -- a characterization that opens the door for political alliances between feminists and their allies and the LGBT community. Fighting female exploitation will help improve the lives of Cameroonian lesbians and bring the issue of equal rights front and center in the nation's political

108 Tris Reid-Smith, “Pope replaces Cameroon Archbishop who said gays destroy humanity” (GayStarsNews, July 31, 2013).

[Http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/pope-replaces-cameroon-archbishop-who-said-gays-destroy-humanity310713](http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/pope-replaces-cameroon-archbishop-who-said-gays-destroy-humanity310713)

109 Samuel Willard Crompton, “Desmond Tutu: Fighting Apartheid” (Chelsea house Press, New York: 2007)

process and in the court of public opinion. The case of Rose, when she was brutally abused, demonstrates that even though they were not outwardly “lesbian”, they still got attacked and were taken advantage off. Yet again, here we observe that the sanctioned discourse of violence against them as part of the LGBTI community was used as a justification for that particular act of violence. In other parts of the continent such as South Africa, many even believe that such thing as “corrective rape” is the impunity these women should face for thinking that they could ever replaced or be a man. In addition to that as well as presented by the interview of LGBTI people that have lived in Cameroon and seeing friends being blackmailed, used or tortured, LGBTI labeling in Cameroon in addition guarantees access to women or men for sexual exploitation.

Facing and pointing out on these issues will push the government to revoke policies or laws such as Article 347 bis not just in Cameroon but also in all countries that have such unjust laws. The government should also ensure that the population can make a change to the structure of a government that calls itself democratic but violates democratic principles. I think this is fundamental for Cameroon especially, given that the country has had the same president, Paul Biya, for 31 years. However, this particularly concept of letting the people decide for their community should be revised in many countries of the African continent given that Paul Biya is not the only one violating democratic principles while his words and actions are saying and showing otherwise. Many other current African president such as Yoweri Museveni, Robert Mugabe, Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, and Teodoro Obiang Nguema should also considers offering this “right” to their people.

Through Education, they should ensure that the Board of Education can review school syllabi and restrain practices or concepts that criminalize different sexual orientations, and initiate new programs that promote respect and equality for all people. I believe there are already schools that provide curriculum on how to teach while maintaining values of respect and understanding, but the government can do a better job ensuring that all schools maintain non-discriminatory policies toward the

LGBTI community. I also think the government should encourage curriculum on sexuality and difference of sexual orientation. Other actions that can provide help in regards to the LGBTI community in Cameroon is to create curriculum and programs that would push educators, journalists and other professionals to exercise professionalism and tolerance while presenting views to others, and to make sure those views are not derogatory to the LGBTI community. Finally asking educators to keep students accountable for their actions that sometimes can come across to others as bullying or disrespect is of a severe necessity and in my opinion will tremendously help as well the goal to reach a more tolerant society.

As for the Media the hope is still that they can lobby and encourage sympathetic portrayals by educating reporters, editors and editorials boards.

As a Cameroonian myself who was raised in that society before emigrating to a less homophobic country, I care deeply about the future of my country of origin and its LGBTI community. I am deeply indebted to the people who participated in my research for giving so much of themselves -- not just to let the world know about the poor and sad situations LGBTI people face in Cameroon, but also for setting an example by working to rid themselves of internalized homophobia. By sharing their experience and wisdom, they will help the LGBT community in Cameroon move towards a future where they can be embraced by family, friends and society and where the rights of all Cameroonians are protected by the government. The administration of Cameroon should also enact laws that will keep police and military accountable for investigating, prosecuting and punishing any group, individual or organization that participates in the abuse of the LGBTI community and its defenders/activists. They should as well incorporate and create possibilities for the LGBTI community to be active in the society, and allow a political party in which LGBTI people would be represented and given a voice in all spheres of their community.



## **Glossary**

### 1) Definitions

Africaness: The belief of Authenticity the African population has in regards to the western world.

Apartheid: An official policy of racial segregation formerly practiced in South Africa, involving political, legal, and economic discrimination against nonwhites.

Bi-sexual: A person characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward both a male and a female.

Colonial heritage: Something that comes or belongs to one by reason of birth from the colonialist; or an inherited lot or portion.

Corrective Rape: a rape intended to punish a lesbian and change her sexual orientation.

Crime: An act committed or omitted in violation of a law forbidding or commanding it and for which punishment is imposed upon conviction.

Cross Dresser: is a person that dresses in clothing characteristics of the gender or sex opposite to his or her own.

Discrimination: Treatment or consideration towards people based on a class or category rather than individual merit; partiality or prejudice.

Eroticism: Abnormally persistent sexual excitement.

Gay: Someone exhibiting sexual desire or behavior directed toward a person or person's of one's own sex.

Homophobia: Irrational fear or intense hatred or discrimination against homosexuals or homosexuality.

Homosexuality: Sexual desire or behavior directed toward a person or persons of one's own sex.

Inter-sexual: A person with intermediate characters between a typical male and a typical female.

Lesbian: a female homosexual, or female attracted sexually & erotically to another female.

Masculinity: having the traditional quality or condition or characteristics of a male

Nationalism: a feeling that people have of being loyal to and proud of their country often with the belief

that it is better and more important than other countries.

Patriotism: Love of and devotion to one's country

Rape: the crime of forcing another person to submit to sex acts, especially sexual intercourse.

Sexuality: The quality or state of being sexual and the possession of the structural and functional traits of sex.

Sodomy: Any or various forms of sexual intercourse held to be unnatural or abnormal, especially anal intercourse or bestiality.

The Penal Code of Cameroon: is the codified body of laws of Cameroon that relate to crime and its punishment.

The west: is a term referring to the different nation of the developed countries that have been heavily influenced by the traditions of the renaissance, the age of Enlightenment and shaped by the expansive colonialism of the 15<sup>th</sup> -20 centuries.

Tradition: an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action or behavior that have been passed down from generation to generation, especially by word to mouth or by practice.

Transsexual: A person who has undergone medical and surgical procedures to alter external sexual characteristics to those of the opposite sex and permanently acts and identify as the opposite sex.

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